

TINFISH ***WITH WINGS***



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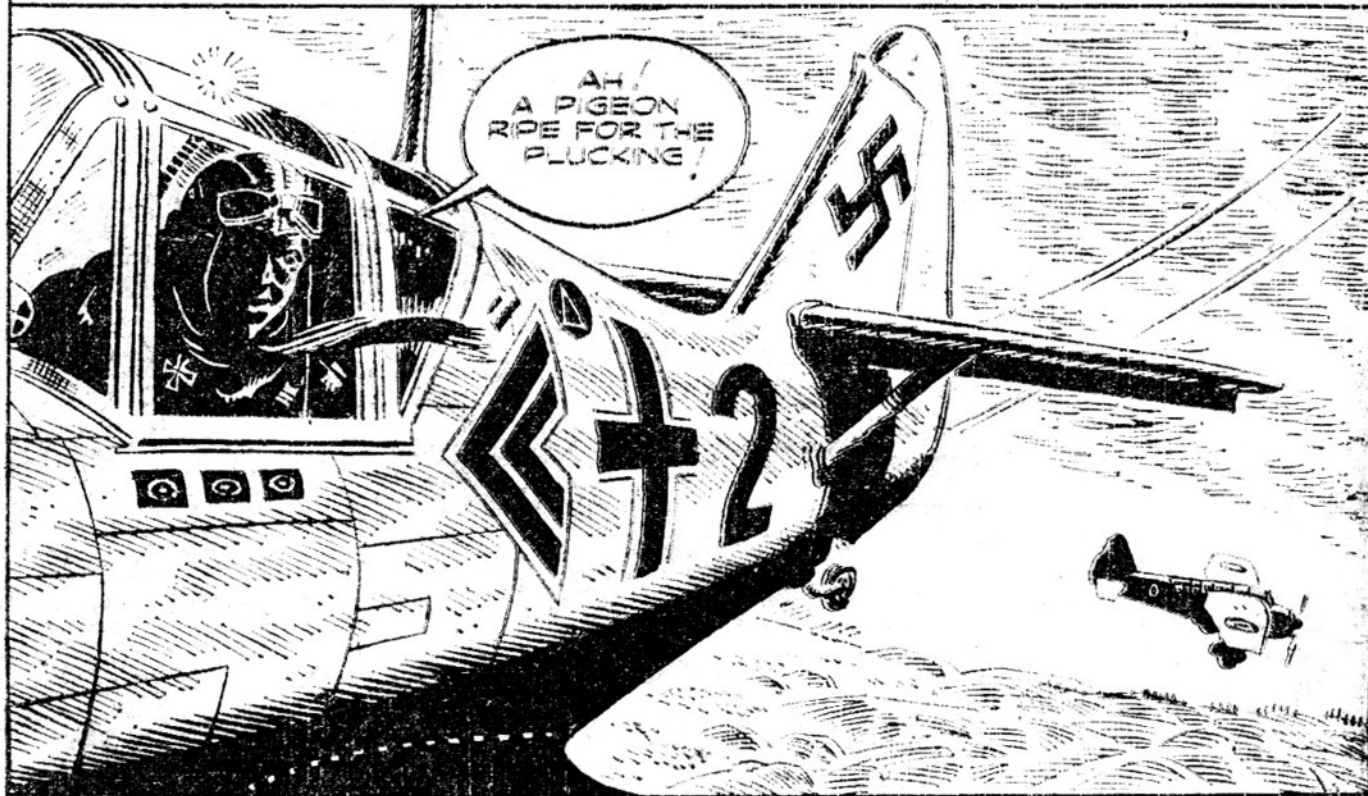
TINFISH WITH WINGS

BY THE SUMMER OF 1942, THE ROLE OF MALTA IN THE MEDITERRANEAN BATTLE HAD GONE OVER TO THE OFFENSIVE. TORPEDO BOMBERS BASED ON THE BATTERED LITTLE ISLAND WERE STRIKING RELENTLESSLY AT ROMMEL'S SUPPLY LINES TO NORTH AFRICA, AND HITLER DECIDED TO MAKE ONE LAST FEROCIOUS ATTEMPT TO SUBDUCE THE STUBBORN BRITISH FORTRESS.



Chapter 1. DEATH OR GLORY BOY?

SNARLING WITH FURY, THE ISLAND SPITFIRES TORE GAPING HOLES IN THE MASSED FORMATIONS OF STUKAS AND MESSERSCHMITT 109s AND AS THE TIDE OF BATTLE SWAYED OVER THE ROCKY COAST, ONE GERMAN FIGHTER PILOT SPOTTED A LESS DANGEROUS ADVERSARY BELOW . . .



KEEN EYES ON AN AIRFIELD INLAND HAD SPOTTED THE UNWIELDY BRITISH LYSANDER. THEIR OWN BEAUFORT BOMBERS MOMENTARILY GROUNDED BY THE FIGHTER BATTLE, THE AIRCREW WATCHED THEIR NEW COMRADE COMING IN TO LAND . . .

IT'S A LYSANDER. MUST BE THE ONE THAT NEW BLOKE'S FERRYING ACROSS FROM GIB. WHAT A TIME TO CHOOSE FOR HIS LANDFALL!

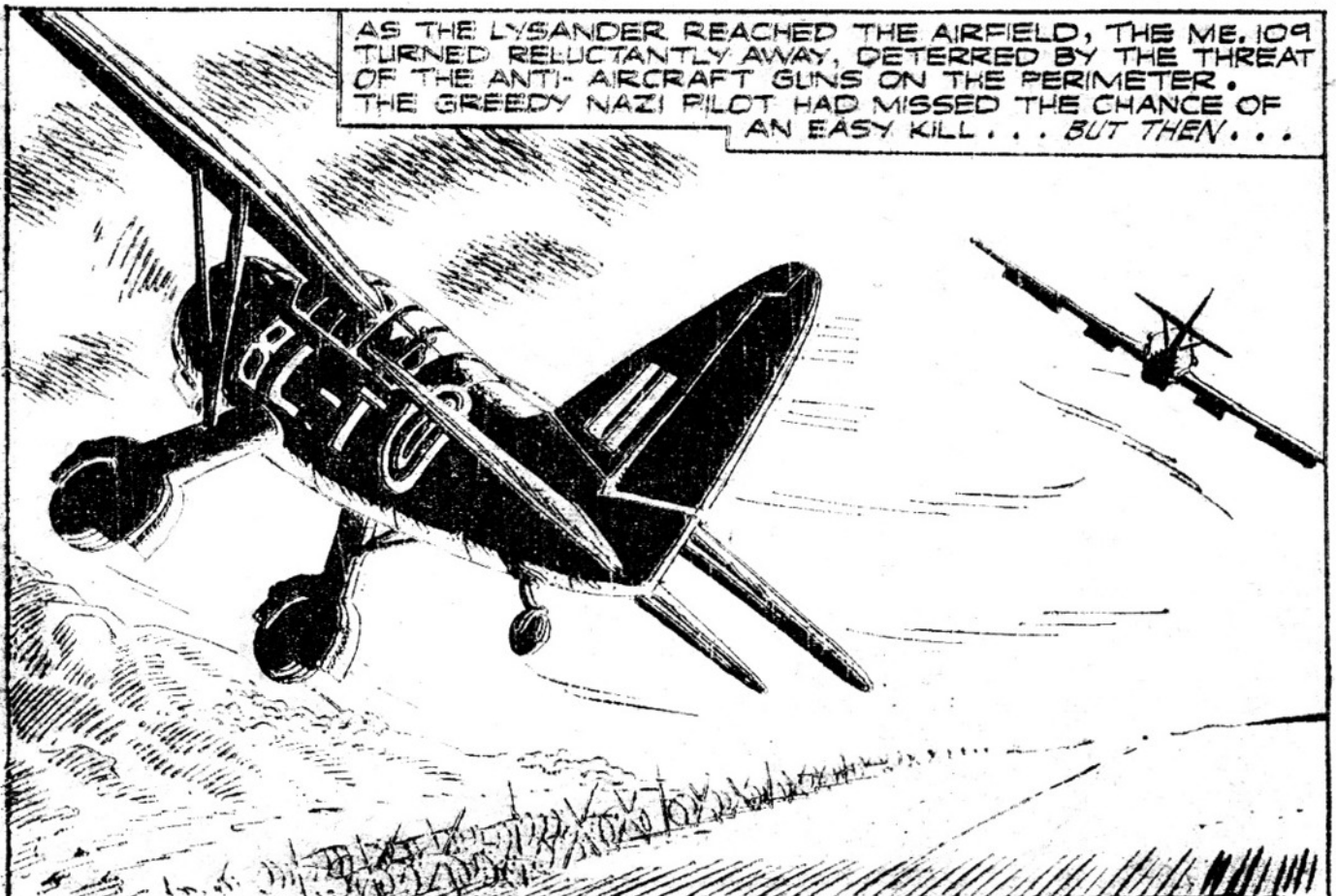


THESE WERE THE MEN WHOSE JOB IT WAS TO STRIKE WITH TORPEDOES AT THE ENEMY SUPPLY CONVOYS AT SEA. MOST OF THEM WERE COLONIALS LIKE PUGNACIOUS SERGEANT RITCHE MOLD OF SYDNEY, WHO WAS THE FIRST TO SEE THROUGH HIS BINOCULARS THAT THE LYSANDER WAS NOT ALONE . . .

THERE'S A ONE-O-NINE ON HIS TAIL. BUT HE'LL MAKE IT ALL RIGHT. JERRY WON'T COME IN TO ATTACK HIM OVER THE ACK-ACK GUNS ON THE AIR STRIP!



AS THE LYSANDER REACHED THE AIRFIELD, THE ME. 109 TURNED RELUCTANTLY AWAY, DETERRED BY THE THREAT OF THE ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUNS ON THE PERIMETER. THE GREEDY NAZI PILOT HAD MISSED THE CHANCE OF AN EASY KILL . . . BUT THEN . . .



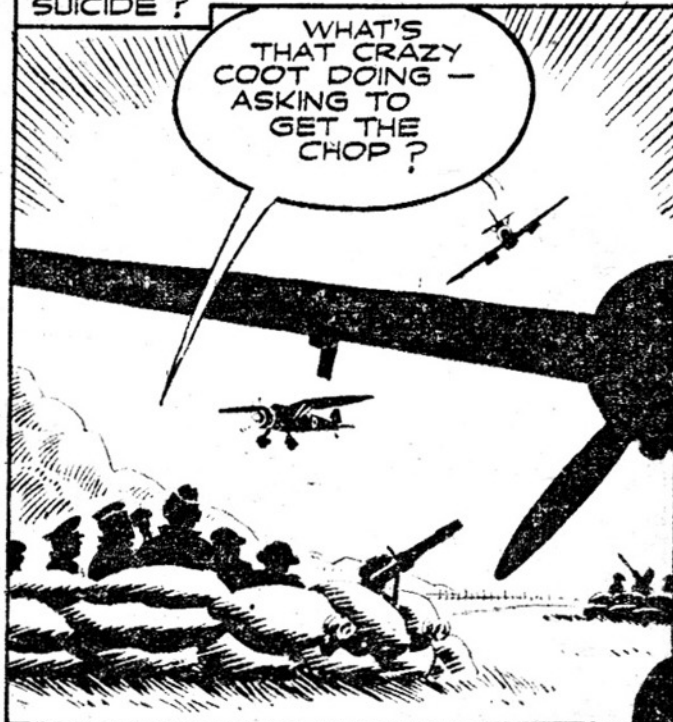
HIS DISBELIEF TURNING TO GLOATING RELISH, THE GERMAN FIGHTER PILOT SAW THE UNWIELDY OLD BRITISH AIRCRAFT BANK AND HEAD AWAY FROM THE SAFETY OF THE AIRFIELD.

SO YOU DARE ME, FOOL OF AN ENGLANDER! WELL, I CALL YOUR BLUFF!

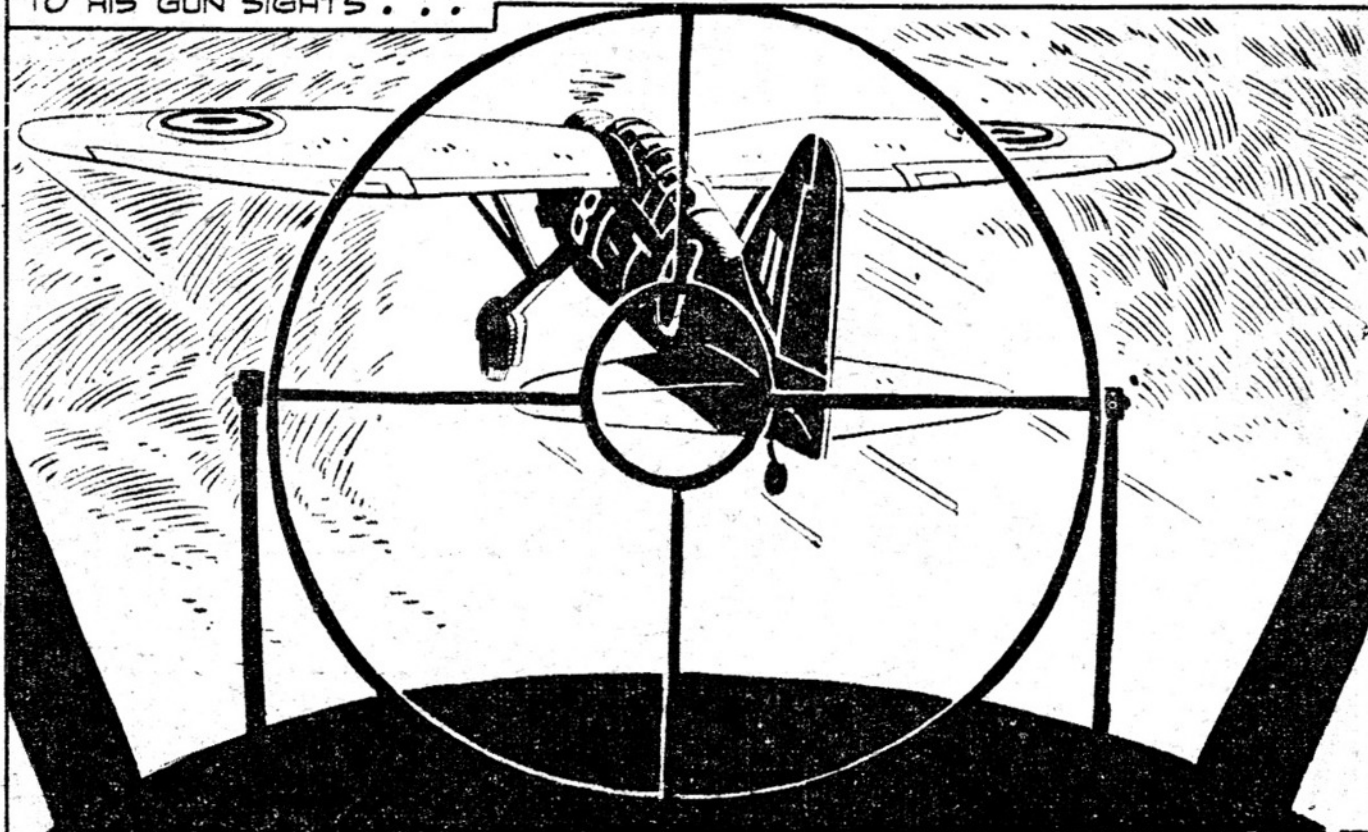


ON THE GROUND, THE WATCHING BOMBER CREWS GASPED. ALREADY THE MESSERSCHMITT WAS SCREAMING DOWN IN A LETHAL POWER DIVE AS THE LYSANDER FLEW OUT OVER UNDEFENDED COUNTRY. WAS THE BRITISH PILOT TRYING TO COMMIT SUICIDE?

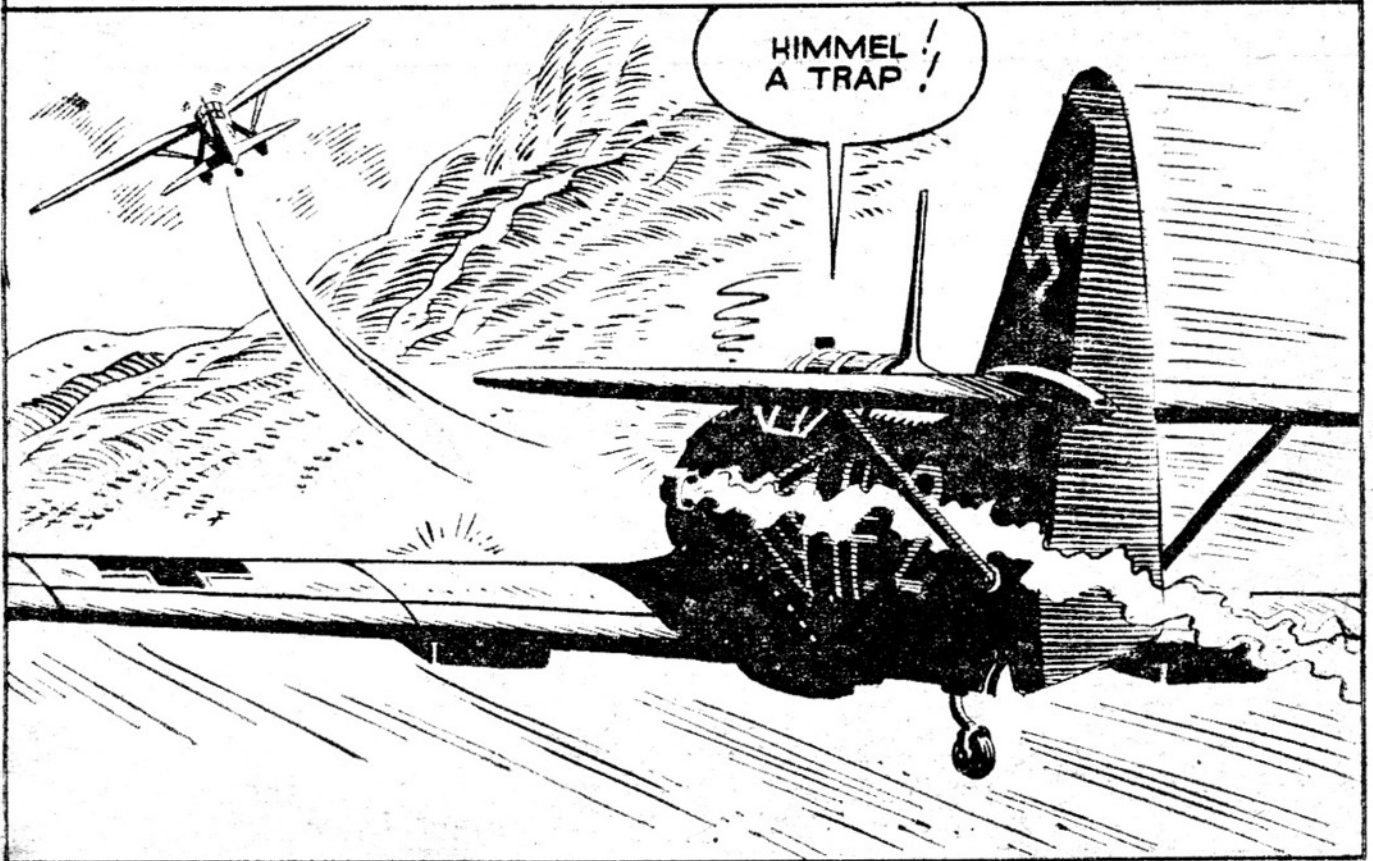
WHAT'S THAT CRAZY COOT DOING — ASKING TO GET THE CHOP?



THE CHASE WAS ONE-SIDED. WITH INSOLENT PRECISION, THE SPEEDY GERMAN FIGHTER TUCKED ITSELF IN AT GROUND LEVEL ON THE TAIL OF ITS SLOW AND UNARMED PREY. GREEDILY, THE NAZI PILOT GLUED HIS EYE TO HIS GUN SIGHTS . . .



DELIBERATELY, THE GERMAN CARESSED HIS GUN BUTTON WITH A GLOVED FINGER. AT LAST THE FINGER STIFFENED . . . AND THEN . . .



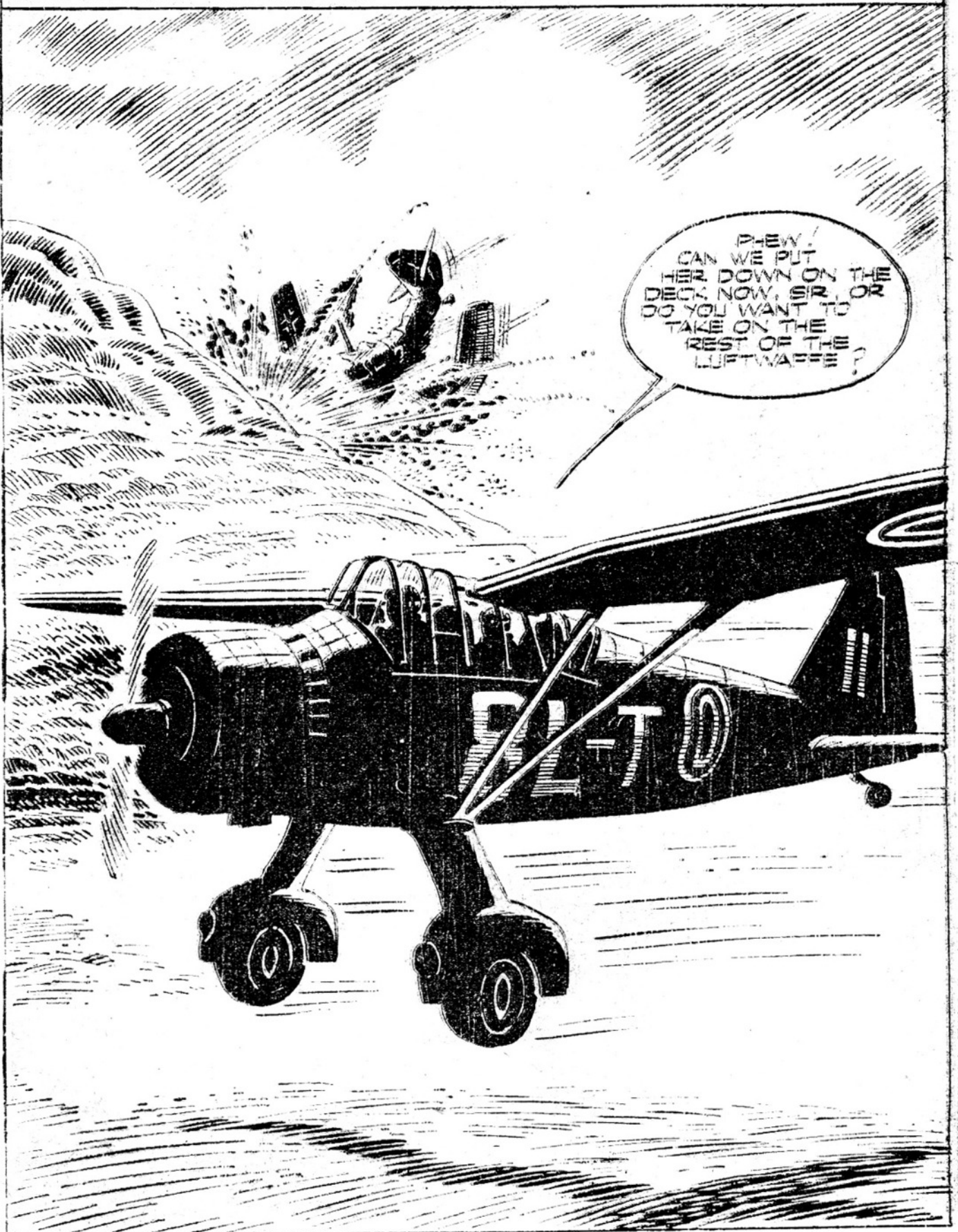
THE LYSANDER HAD WHIPPED AWAY IN A STEEP TURN . . . AND REVEALED A ROCKY HILL DEAD IN THE PATH OF THE ONRUSHING MESSERSCHMITT. HIS REFLEXES SLACKENED WITH PREMATURE TRIUMPH, THE GERMAN PILOT CLAWED IN SUDDEN TERROR AT HIS CONTROLS . . .



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BUT THE TRAP HAD BEEN WELL-SPRUNG. THE GERMAN FIGHTER FOUGHT DESPERATELY FOR HEIGHT . . . AND FAILED. AT 350 M.P.H., IT SLAMMED WITH TERRIBLE VIOLENCE INTO THE CREST OF THE HILL.

PHEW!
CAN WE PUT
HER DOWN ON THE
DECK NOW, SIR, OR
DO YOU WANT TO
TAKE ON THE
REST OF THE
LUFTWAFFE?



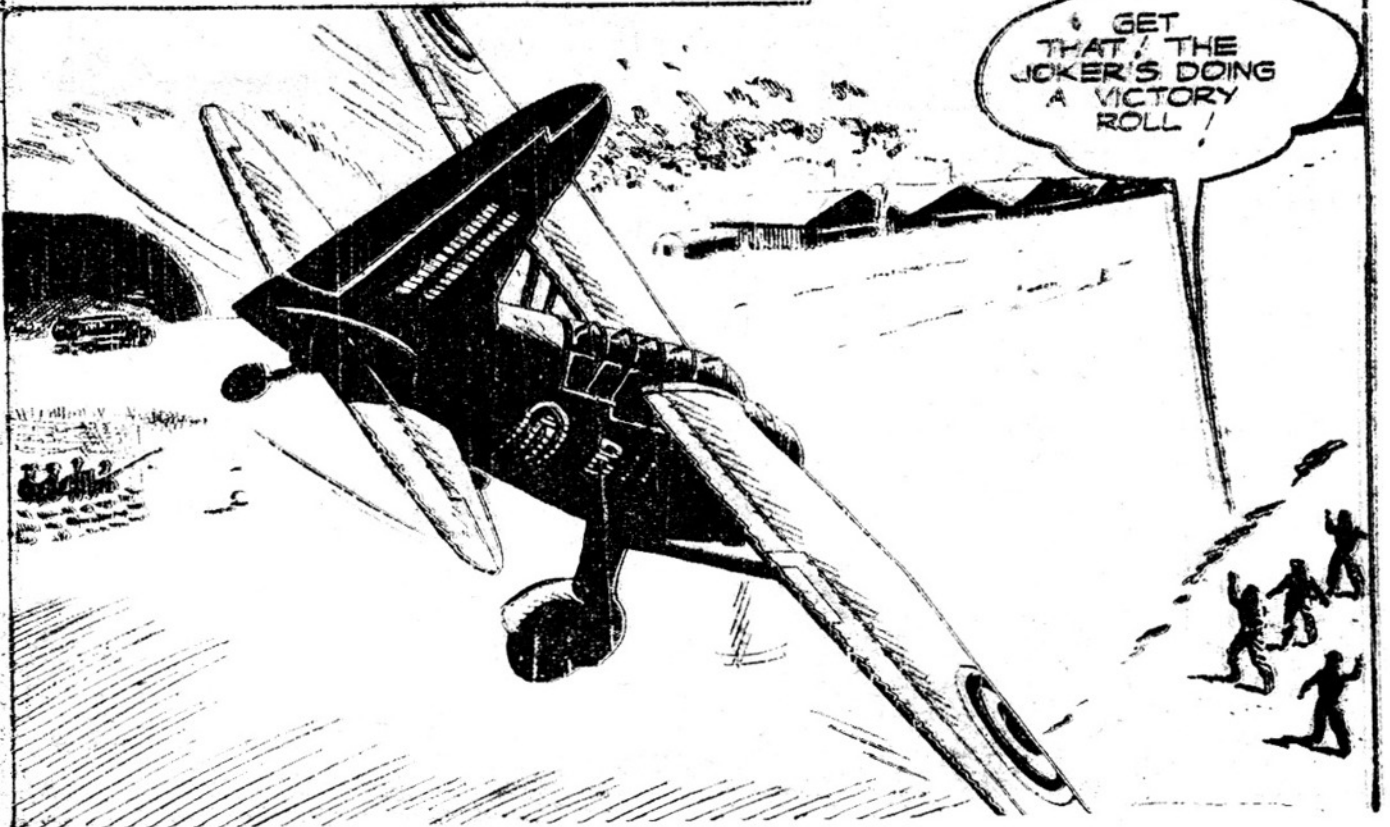
THE LYSANDER'S OBSERVER
WIPE HIS BROW NERVOUSLY.
FLYING WITH FLIGHT
LIEUTENANT GERRY TEMPEST
WAS A HAIR-RAISING
EXPERIENCE AND HE FOR
ONE HAD HAD ENOUGH.

THAT'S
DO FOR ONE DAY
SERGEANT, BUT
BEFORE WE
HAND OVER
THIS OLD
KITE...



THE BOMBER CREWS ON THE AIRFIELD, STILL GASPING WITH AMAZEMENT
AT THE EXTRAORDINARY COMBAT THEY HAD WITNESSED, CAME RUNNING
OUT TO GREET THE VICTORIOUS LYSANDER.

GET
THAT! THE
JOKER'S DOING
A VICTORY
ROLL!



BUT SERGEANT RITCHIE MOLD WAS UNIMPRESSED. DUBIOUSLY HE APPROACHED THE LYSANDER WITH LIEUTENANT THEO CLIFF AND SERGEANT BILL SAVILL OF NEW ZEALAND, THE NAVIGATOR AND WIRELESS OPERATOR WHO FLEW WITH HIM.

YOU'VE GOT TO HAND IT, TO HIM, RITCHIE. THE WAY HE LED THAT ONE-O-NINE SMACK INTO THE HILL WAS A WIZARD BIT OF FLYING!

MAYBE, BUT IT WAS STARK CRAZY, TOO! LET'S SEE WHAT THE NAVIGATOR'S GOT TO SAY ABOUT IT!



THE THREE MEN WATCHED CURIOUSLY AS THE TALL AND HANDSOME ENGLISH FLIGHT LIEUTENANT CLIMBED DOWN SMILING ON TO THE TARMAC, BUT IT WAS THE LYSANDER'S OBSERVER RITCHIE MOLD WHO WANTED TO QUESTION . . .

TEMPEST'S HIS NAME - SUITS HIM A TREAT, TOO! HE'S BEEN BREATHING FIRE EVER SINCE WE LEFT GIB! FANCY TAKING ON A ONE-O-NINE IN A LYSANDER WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE TO! AM I GLAD HE'S COME HERE TO FLY BEAUFORTS AND I'M STAYING WITH THE OLD LYSANDER!



SO MISTER TEMPEST'S JOINING THE SQUADRON, IS HE? AND OUR SKIPPER'S DUE FOR PROMOTION. BILL!

FLIGHT LIEUTENANT GERRY TEMPEST HAD JUST FINISHED A TOUR IN MOSQUITOES. THE OBSERVER'S ACCOUNT OF HIS EXPLOITS MADE THE SCEPTICAL AUSTRALIAN GRIN, THE R.A.F. HAD A PHRASE FOR TROUBLE-SHOOTERS LIKE TEMPEST...

COME AND HEAR THE LATEST ABOUT THIS TEMPEST JOKER, BILL! HE'S A DEATH-OR-GLORY BOY IF EVER THERE WAS ONE!

HE MAY BE, RITCHIE - BUT HE'S OUR NEW SKIPPER!



THE GRIN FROZE ON SERGEANT MOLD'S FACE WHEN HE LEARNED THAT THIS DARE-DEVIL PILOT WAS TO BE THE SKIPPER OF HIS OWN BEAUFORT!

YOU MEAN HE'S BEEN CREWED UP WITH YOU, ME AND THEO?

THAT'S WHAT I MEAN! THE SKIPPER'S BEEN POSTED TO U.K. AND THE C.O.'S GIVEN US TEMPEST INSTEAD! THEO WANTS US TO COME OUTSIDE AND MEET HIM NOW!



A DEATH-OR-GLORY BOY WAS A BOON TO THE NEWSPAPER READERS BACK HOME, BUT TO THE MEN WHO FLEW WITH HIM AND WERE FORCED TO TAKE THE SAME RISKS, HE COULD BE A PAIN IN THE NECK! THAT WAS RITCHIE MOLD'S VIEW!

AND THIS IS OUR WOP/A.G., TEMPEST!
RITCHIE'S AN AUSSIE, AND A TOUGH
ONE!



GLAD
TO MEET YOU,
SERGEANT! I HOPE
I CAN GIVE YOU AS MUCH
GOOD HUNTING AS
YOUR OLD SKIPPER
DID!

OUTSIDE THE MESS HUT, THE
CREWS SHOOK HANDS WITH THEIR
NEW SKIPPER. COOL AND
EXPERIENCED EYES MEASURED
THE TALL ENGLISHMAN — FOUR
LIVES WOULD BE
IN HIS HANDS ON
THEIR NEXT
SORTIE.



JUST
GET ME BACK FROM
OPS IN ONE PIECE,
THAT'S ALL I ASK —
SKIPPER!

WAS THIS TEMPEST THE SORT OF
RECKLESS PILOT THE R.A.F.
CALLED A "DEATH-OR-GLORY BOY"?
RITCHIE MOLD HAD ALREADY MADE
UP HIS MIND... BUT NOW THEY
WOULD KNOW SOON ENOUGH.



THERE
GOES THE GONG!
WONDER WHAT
WE'RE HAVING A
CRACK AT THIS
TIME?

GRABBING THEIR FLYING KIT, THE BEAUFORT CREWS HURRIED INTO THE BRIEFING ROOM . . .

THE CONVOY'S OFF SAPIENZA IN SOUTHERN GREECE ACCORDING TO THE SPIT'S SIGHTING REPORT. IT CONSISTS OF AN OIL TANKER WITH AN ESCORT OF THREE ITALIAN DESTROYERS AND A CRUISER. THAT OIL'S HEADING FOR ROMMEL'S TANKS IN LIBYA, AND YOU'VE GOT TO STOP IT GETTING THERE. IMMEDIATE TAKE-OFF AND GOOD HUNTING.



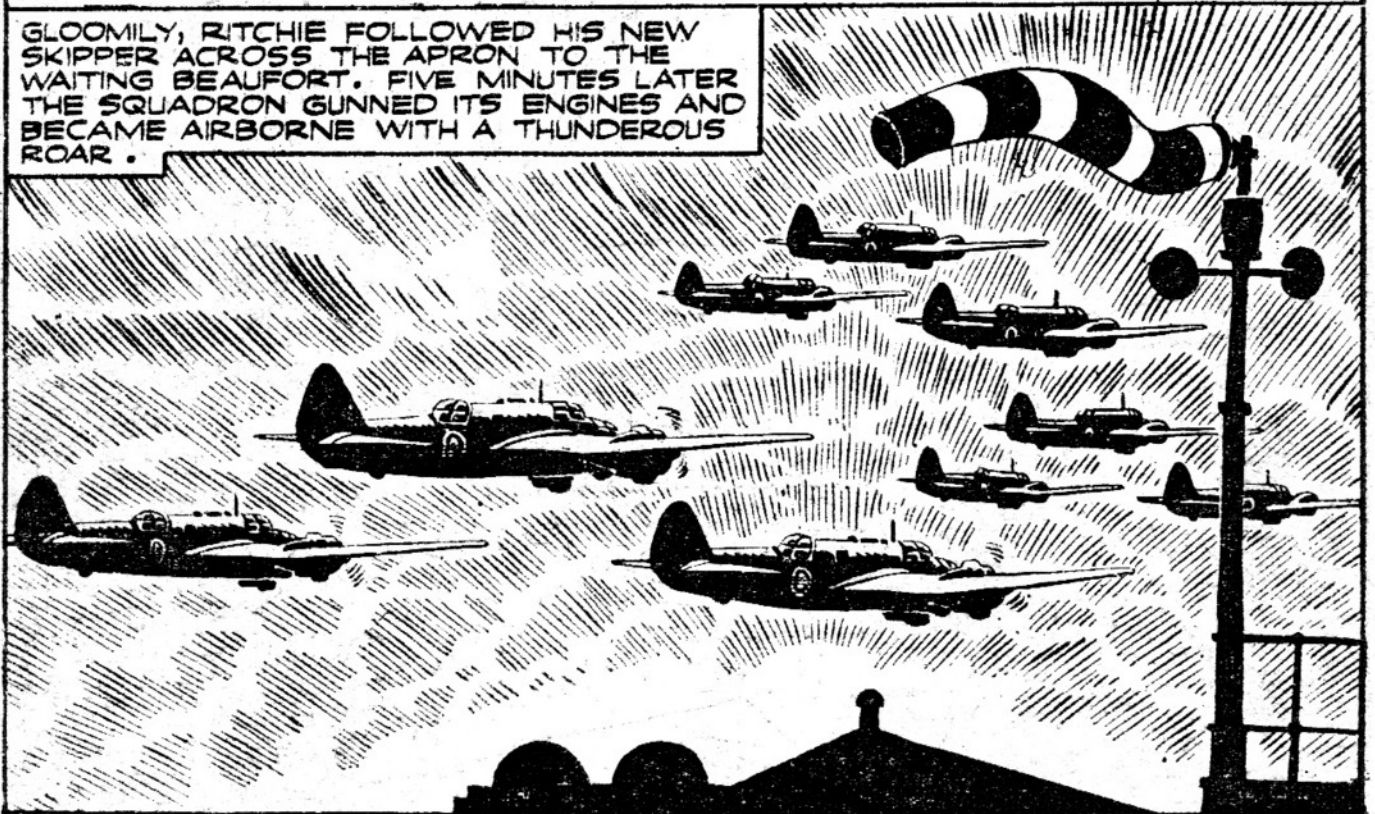
THE TARGET WAS AN ENEMY CONVOY HUGGING THE COAST OF GREECE BEFORE MAKING A DASH ACROSS THE NAVY-PATROLLED MEDITERRANEAN TO TOBRUK, NOW THE PRINCIPAL SUPPLY PORT OF ROMMEL'S AFRIKA KORPS.

KEEP YOUR FINGERS CROSSED, BILL. SOMETHING TELLS ME WE'RE GOING TO NEED LUCK THIS TRIP WITH THAT JOKER UP FRONT!



Chapter 2. TORPEDO ATTACK

GLOOMILY, RITCHIE FOLLOWED HIS NEW SKIPPER ACROSS THE APRON TO THE WAITING BEAUFORT. FIVE MINUTES LATER THE SQUADRON GUNNED ITS ENGINES AND BECAME AIRBORNE WITH A THUNDEROUS ROAR.



THE BEAUFORT CARRIED TWIN BROWNING'S IN THE WINGS AND IN A POWER-OPERATED TURRET. THERE WERE ALSO TWO SINGLE FREE GUNS FORWARD OF THE TURRET WHICH THE WIRELESS OPERATOR MANNED WHEN GOING INTO ACTION. . . .



NOW THEY WERE CLEAR OF MALTA AND THE DANGER OF A GERMAN FIGHTER JUMPING THEM, TEMPEST TOOK THE BEAUFORT DOWN TO SEA LEVEL AND SET COURSE EAST-NORTH-EAST FOR SAPIENZA AT 160 KNOTS . . .

TURRET GUNS TESTED! NO SIGN OF BANDITS — SKIPPER!

ROGER! KEEP A GOOD LOOK-OUT, WE'VE A COUPLE OF HOURS' FLYING BEFORE WE GET TO SAPIENZA!

FREED FROM IMMEDIATE DANGER, THE COOL ENGLISH FLIGHT LIEUTENANT PONDERED ON THE UNMISTAKABLE HOSTILITY OF HIS AUSTRALIAN AIR GUNNER'S VOICE . . .

THE AUSSIE'S TAKEN A DISLIKE TO ME, HASN'T HE, CLIFF? KNOW WHY?

YOU'RE IMAGINING THINGS, SKIPPER! I'M GOING DOWN INTO THE NOSE!



UNEASILY, THE THOUGHTFUL SOUTH AFRICAN NAVIGATOR PARRIED TEMPEST'S QUESTION AND WENT DOWN INTO THE BEAUFORT'S PERSPEX NOSE. AS THE SEA SLID BY FIFTY FEET BELOW HIM, HE TRIED TO SHAKE OFF HIS FOREBODINGS.



IF RITCHIE'S WRONG ABOUT THE SKIPPER HE'LL HAVE TO BE TOLD TO PIPE DOWN. IF HE'S RIGHT - WELL, IT'S EVENS BETWEEN DEATH AND GLORY!

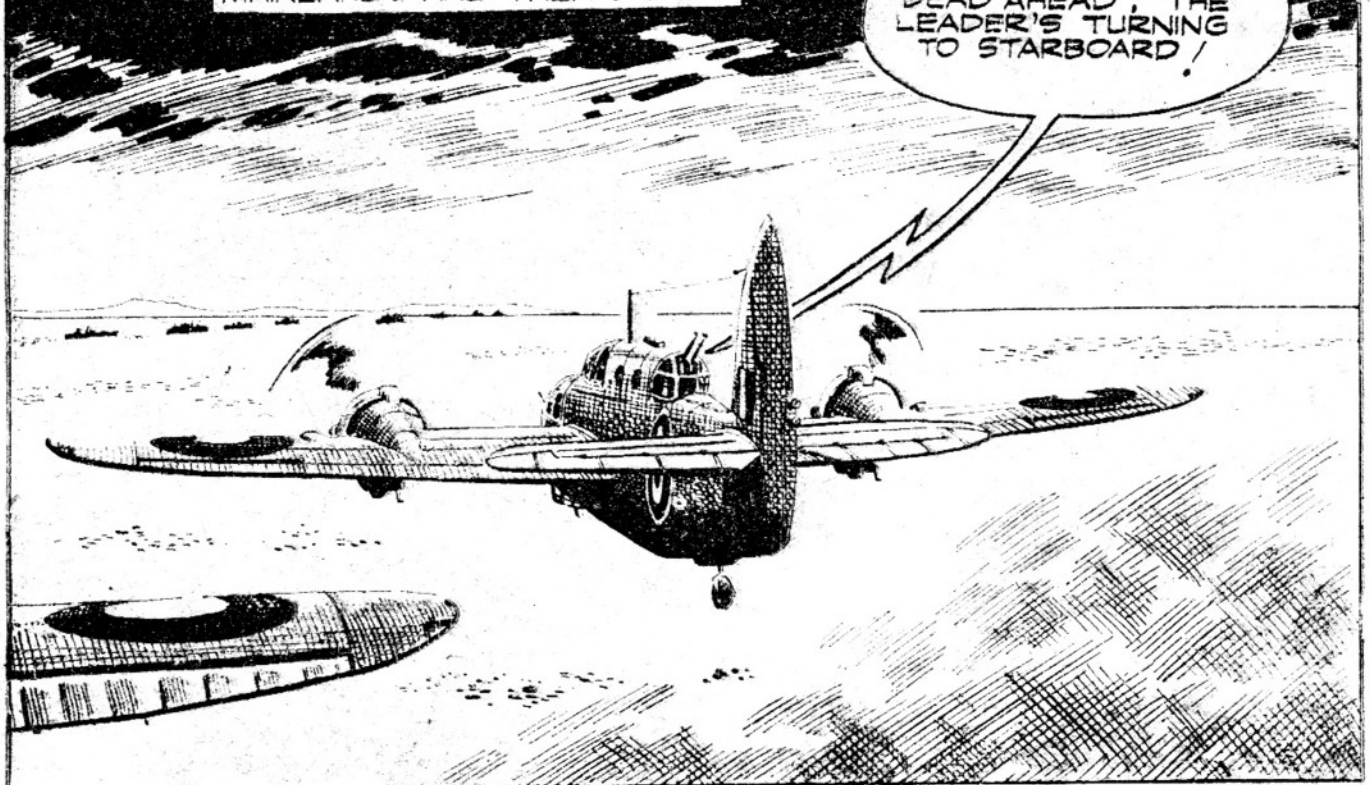
FOR TWO HOURS THE SQUADRON ROARED ON ACROSS THE PEACEFUL MEDITERRANEAN TO KEEP THEIR RENDEZVOUS WITH FATE. AT LAST THE RADAR SCREEN FLICKERED INTO BALEFUL LIFE UNDER BILL SAVILL'S TENSE GAZE.



BLIPS ON THE SEARCH RADAR, SKIPPER!

CAN YOU SEE THEM YET, CLIFF?

IN THE NOSE OF THE PLANE, THE NAVIGATOR SCANNED THE HORIZON. FAR AHEAD HE COULD ALREADY SEE THE FAINT SHADOW OF THE GREEK MAINLAND. AND THEN . . .



I SEE THEM NOW! EIGHT MILES AWAY, DEAD AHEAD, THE LEADER'S TURNING TO STARBOARD!

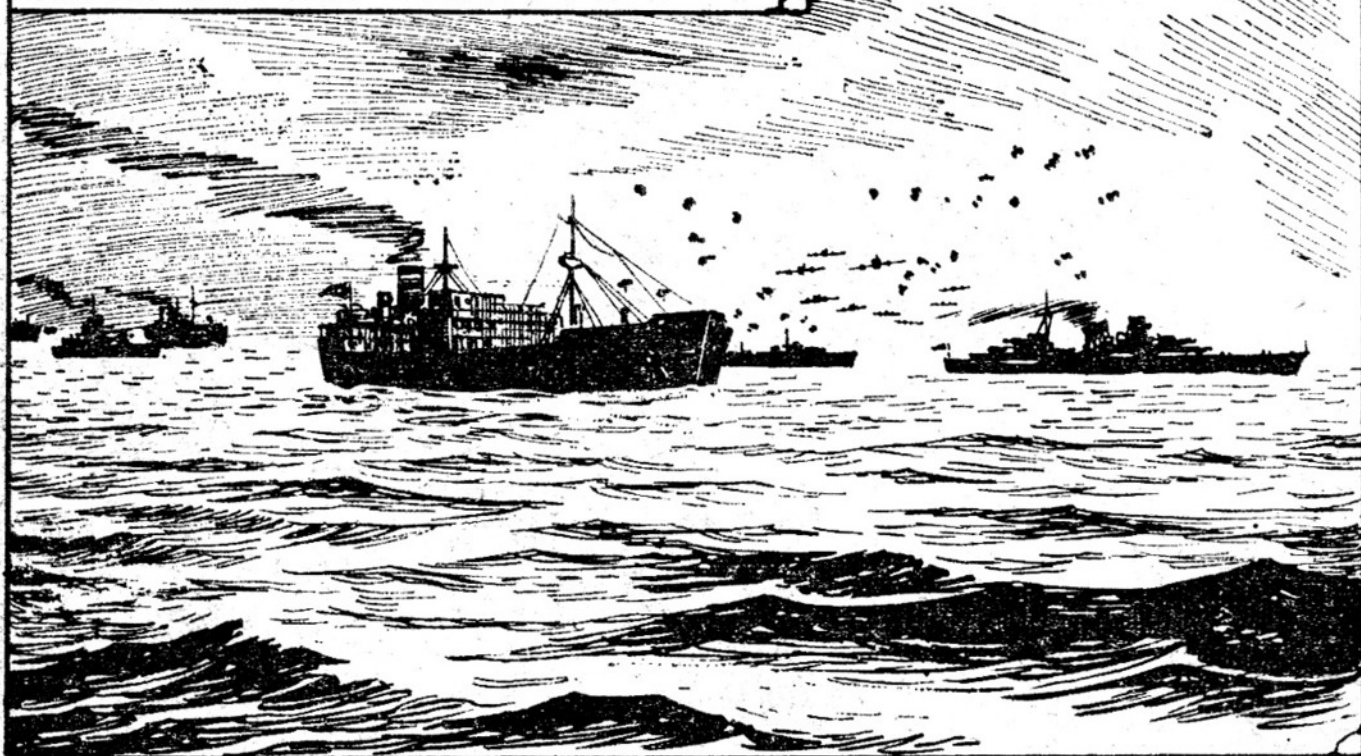
THE LEADING BEAUFORT WAGGLED ITS WINGS AND BANKED GENTLY TO STARBOARD AS THE ENEMY SHIPS CAME IN SIGHT. COOLLY, GERRY TEMPEST TUCKED HIS AIRCRAFT IN BEHIND IT AND ALERTED HIS CREW...



THEIR SKIPPER'S FIRM HANDLING OF THE AIRCRAFT HAD IMPRESSED THEO CLIFF AND BILL SAVILL - BUT THE PUGNACIOUS AUSTRALIAN AIR GUNNER WAS UNCONVINCED...



A MILE AWAY NOW, THE ITALIAN DESTROYERS CLOSED UP IN DEFENCE, THEIR GUNS TRAVERSING TOWARDS THE ATTACKING AIRCRAFT. THE NINE BEAUFORTS CONVERGED IN SCREAMING FURY ON THE CONVOY, THE TANKER THEIR CHIEF TARGET . . .



AT HALF - A - MILE RANGE, THE SEA IN FRONT OF THE BEAUFORT'S NOSE BEGAN TO BOIL WITH A LASHING FURY OF MACHINE GUN FIRE FROM THE NEAREST DESTROYER. CALCULATING THE TANKER'S SPEED, GERRY TEMPEST LAID OFF DEFLECTION ON THE TORPEDO SIGHT . . .



STEADY AS AN ARROW, TEMPEST'S AIRCRAFT TORE THROUGH A MURDEROUS CURTAIN OF HIGH EXPLOSIVE ON ITS FINAL RUN IN. AS THE RANGE CLOSED TO A THOUSAND YARDS, THE BEAUFORT ON ITS LEFT JERKED AS THOUGH ON A MONSTROUS STRING . . .



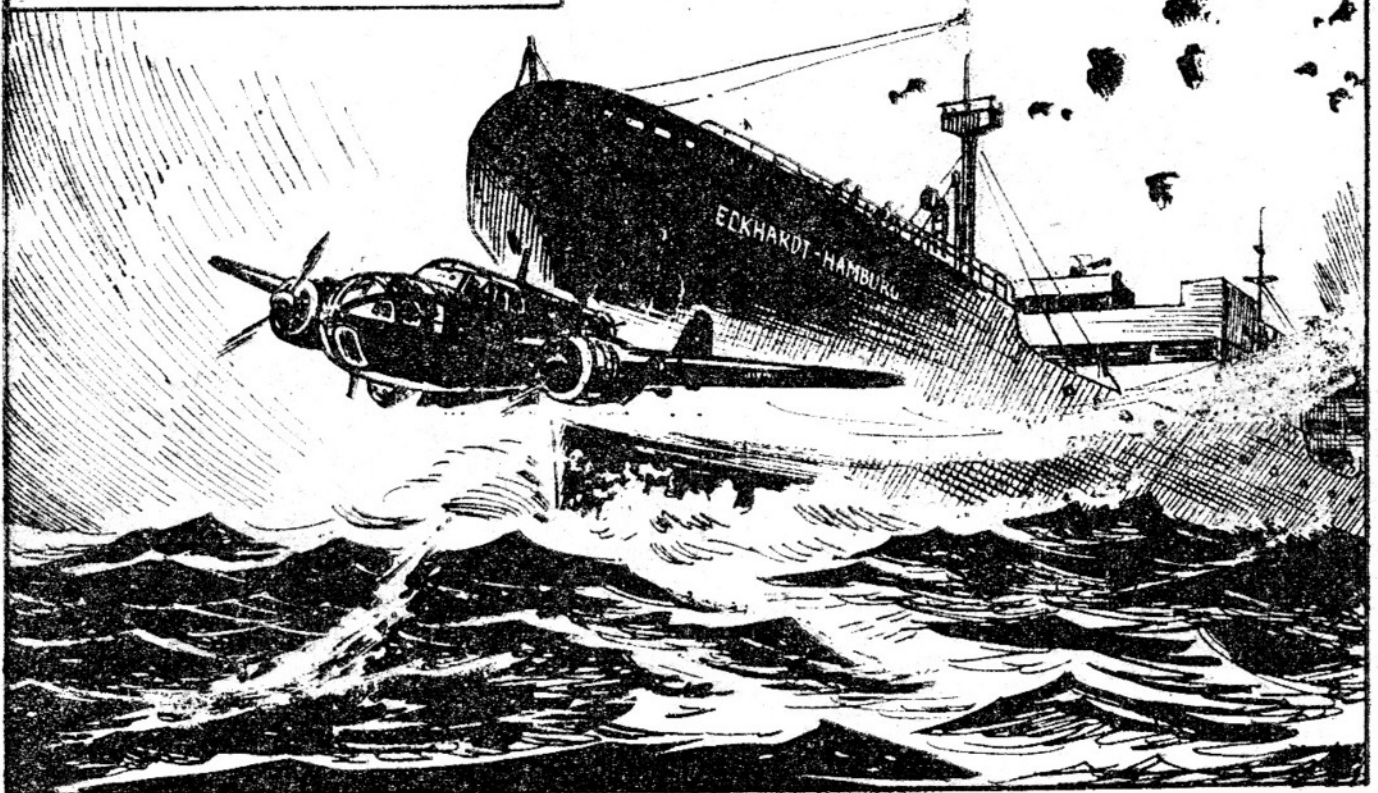
STILL TEMPEST HELD HIS AIRCRAFT ON ITS DEADLY COURSE WITH ROCKLIKE STEADINESS. AS THE TANKER LOOMED DEAD AHEAD AND THE TORPEDO-SIGHT CAME ON, HIS EYES BLAZED . . .



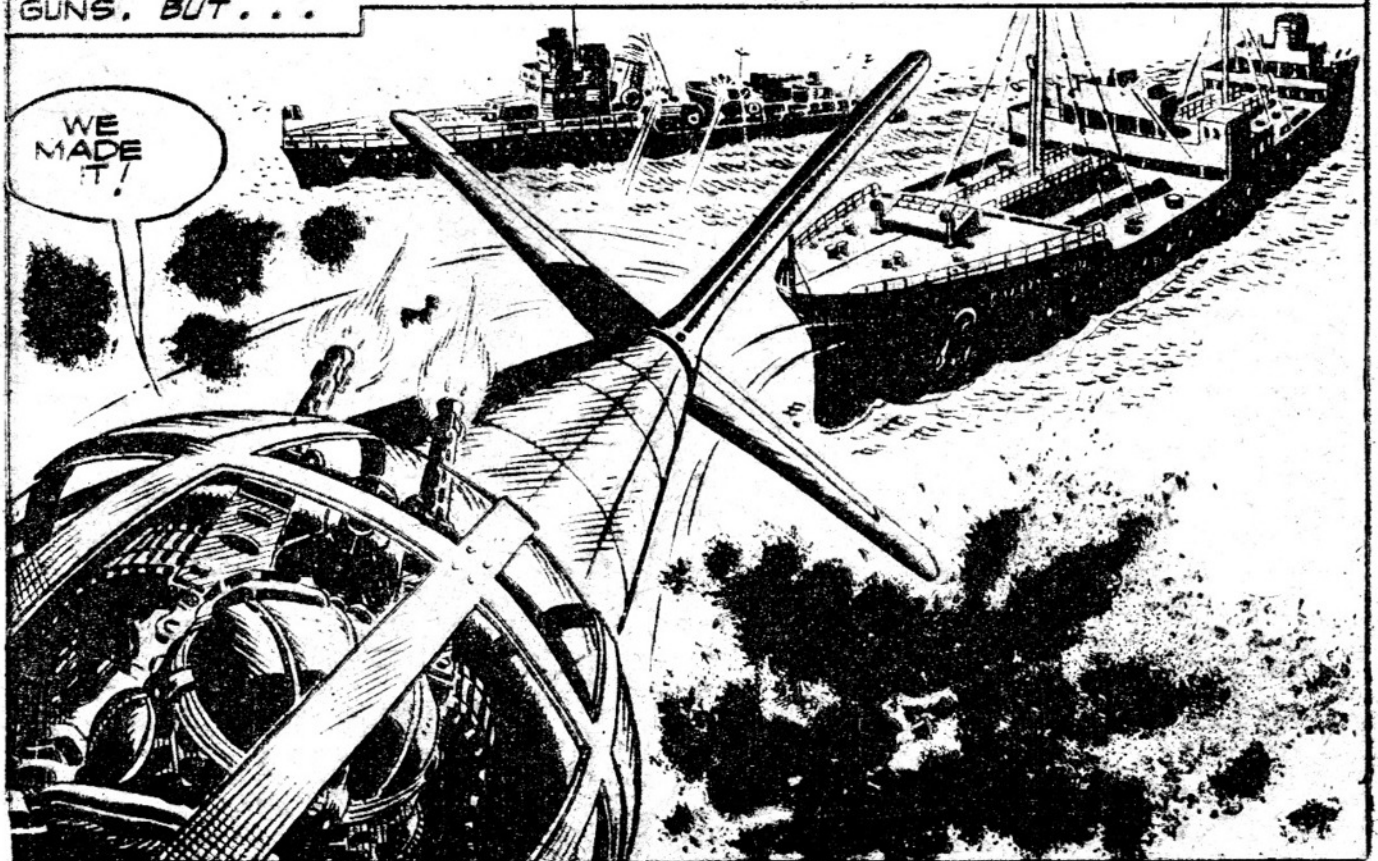
LIEUTENANT THEO CLIFF PRESSED THE RELEASE BUTTON AND WAITED... IT WAS A FULL SECOND BEFORE HE REALISED THAT THE BEAUFORT HAD NOT KICKED UPWARD AS IT SHOULD HAVE DONE IF THE WEIGHT OF THE TORPEDO HAD GONE . . .



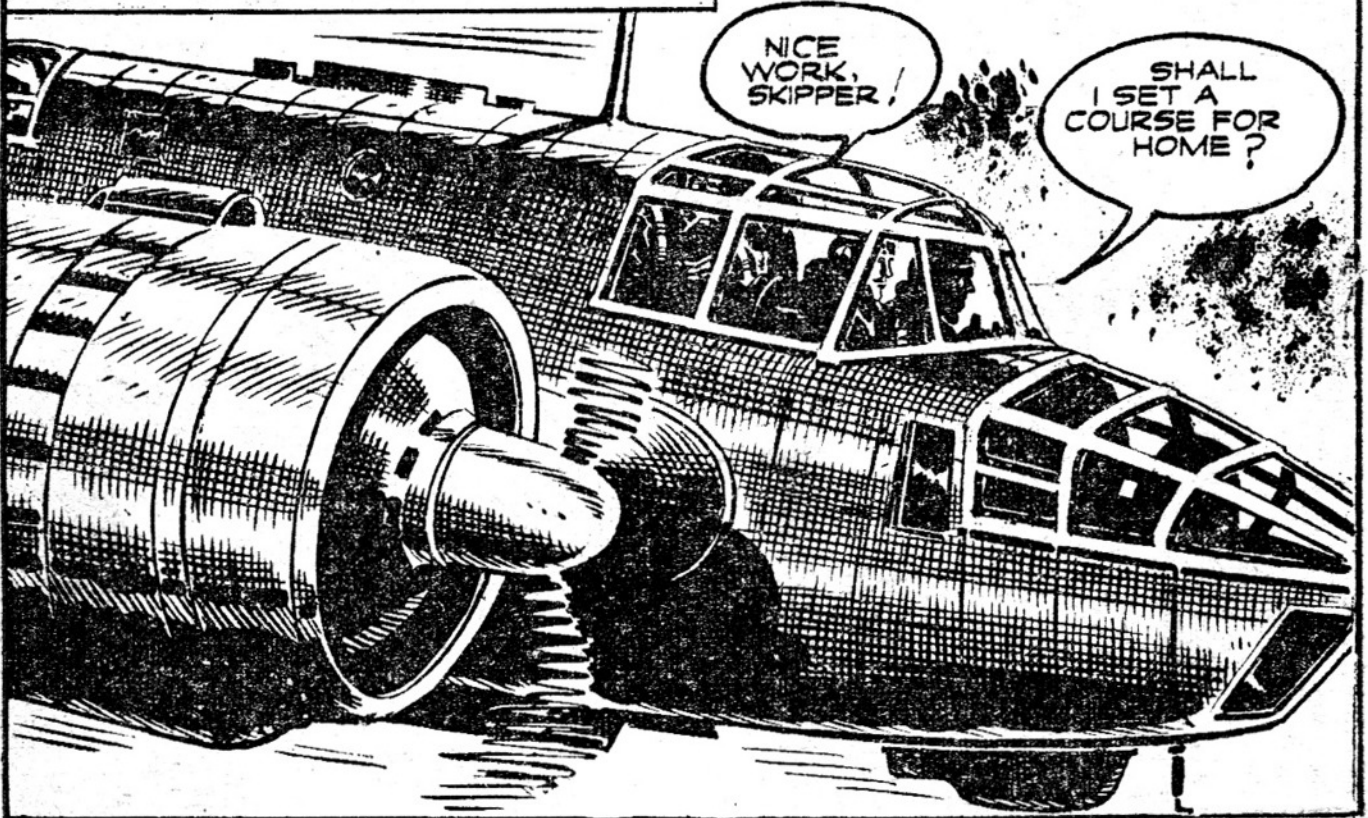
WITH ITS LETHAL CARGO STILL CRADLED UNDER THE FUSELAGE, THE BEAUFORT ROCKETED AT SEA LEVEL UNDER THE STARK BOWS OF THE GERMAN TANKER . . .



AS GERRY TEMPEST FLUNG THE BEAUFORT BACK IN A STEEP CLIMBING TURN, IT SHUDDERED IN A VICIOUS BLAST OF THE DESTROYER ESCORT'S GUNS. BUT . . .



THE TENSION IN THE CREW COMPARTMENT EASED DRAMATICALLY. THEY HAD RUN THE GAUNTLET OF FIRE AND COME THROUGH UNSCATHED, AND NOW THEY GRINNED WITH DEEP RELIEF.



ONLY FLIGHT LIEUTENANT GERRY TEMPEST DID NOT SMILE. HIS EYES WERE COOL STILL, AND CALCULATING. EVEN AS HIS CREW'S THOUGHTS TURNED TO MALTA AND A SAFE RETURN, HIS HANDS TAUTENED ON THE CONTROLS!



THE SHARP LURCH OF THE AIRCRAFT FLUNG THE GUNNERS TO THEIR FEET. THEY STEADIED THEMSELVES AND LOOKED UP TENSELY. THE NEW SKIPPER'S VOICE WAS AS CALM AS EVER, BUT HIS WORDS WERE EXPLOSIVE !



SORRY, CHAPS, I'M JUST TRYING TO FREE THE TORP. WE'VE STILL GOT IT REMEMBER ? I THINK WE'LL LEAVE THE TANKER TO THE SQUADRON AND USE IT ON THAT EYTIE CRUISER DOWN THERE !

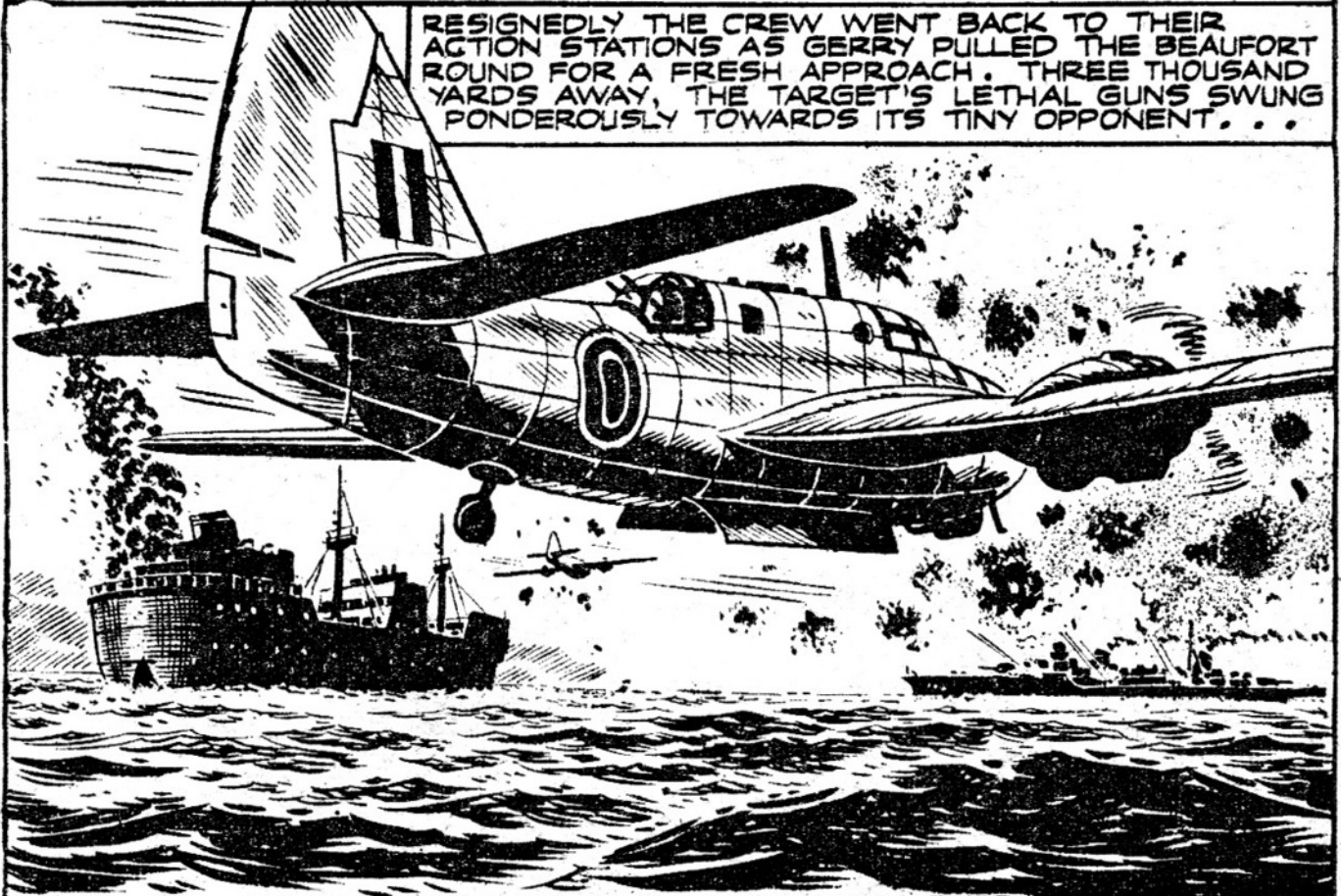
IT WAS NOT IN GERRY TEMPEST'S NATURE TO RETURN TO BASE WITHOUT HITTING THE ENEMY, AND HIS CREW WERE GOING TO LEARN A LOT ABOUT GERRY TEMPEST'S NATURE BEFORE THIS OPERATION WAS OVER !



I'M NOT GOING BACK WITH A TORP UNUSED, CLIFF !

WHAT DID I TELL YOU, BILL, THE DEATH-OR-GLORY BOY IN ACTION !

RESIGNEDLY THE CREW WENT BACK TO THEIR ACTION STATIONS AS GERRY PULLED THE BEAUFORT ROUND FOR A FRESH APPROACH. THREE THOUSAND YARDS AWAY, THE TARGET'S LETHAL GUNS SWUNG PONDEROUSLY TOWARDS ITS TINY OPPONENT . . .



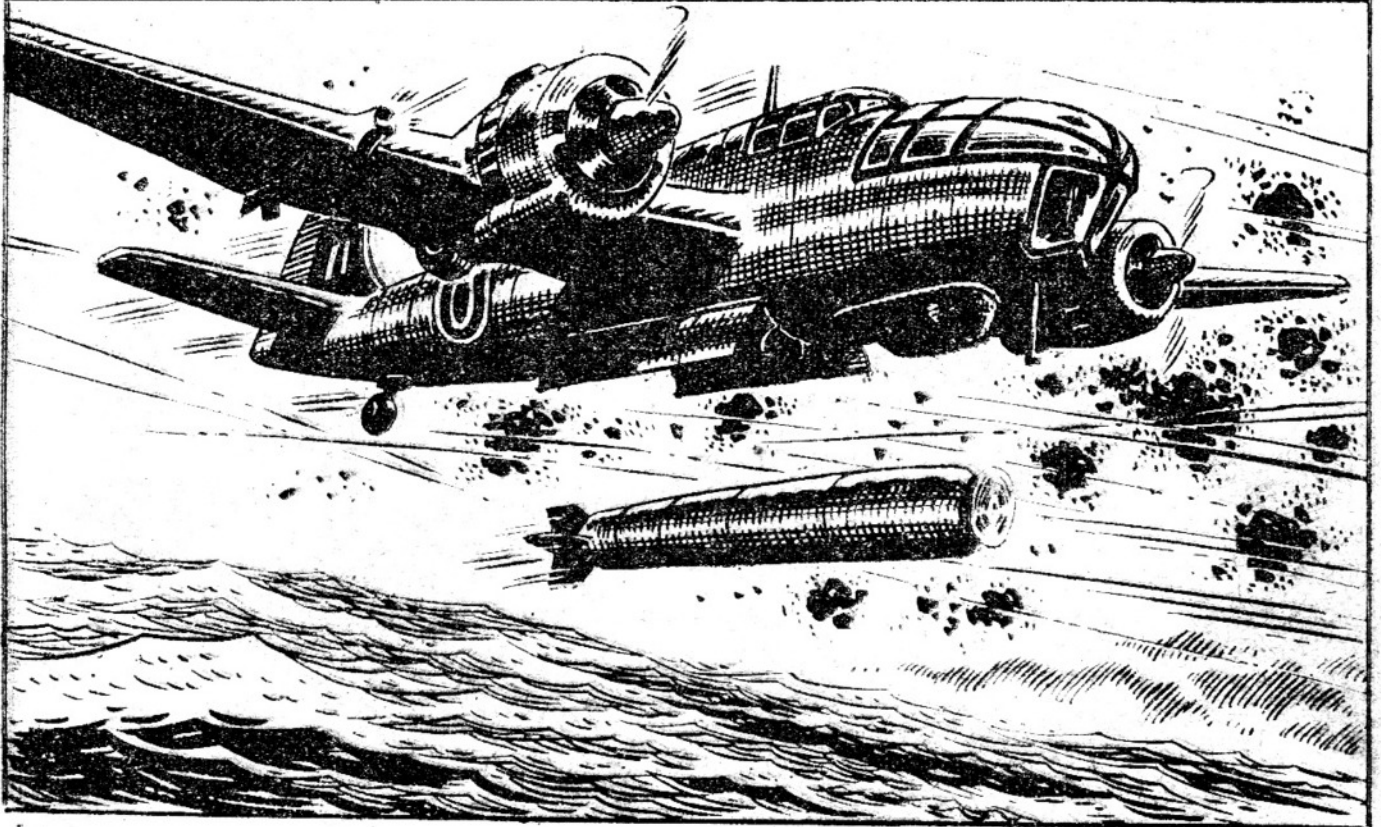
BALANCED BEHIND THE TWIN BROWNING'S IN THE BEAUFORT'S TURRET, RITCHIE MOLD FELT A BLACK RAGE GRIP HIS THROAT AS THE CRUISER SWUNG INTO HIS SIGHTS . . .



AS THE BRISTLING CURTAIN OF FIRE FROM THE ITALIAN CRUISER'S GUNS WHIPPED TOWARDS THE LUNGING BEAUFORT, GERRY TEMPEST WATCHED THE TORPEDO - SIGHT AND COOLLY WAITED.



AT THE CRACK OF HIS SKIPPER'S VOICE, THEO PRESSED THE RELEASE BUTTON. DEADLY AS A STRIKING SHARK, THE TORPEDO DROPPED FROM ITS RACK UNDER THE FUSELAGE AND SLICED INTO THE SEA BELOW.



AS THE BEAUFORT SURGED FORWARD AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN NAVIGATOR SHOUTED IN TRIUMPH, GERRY TEMPEST OPENED THE THROTTLES AND HAULED THE AIRCRAFT OFF THE SEA . . . THE CRUISER'S SIDE LOOMED LIKE A GREY STEEL CLIFF . . .



TORP
GONE! RUNNING
HARD AND
TRUE!

GOOD SHOW!
NOW HOLD TIGHT!

ENGINES SCREAMING, THE BEAUFORT ROARED OVER THE CRUISER'S AFTER DECK WITH INCHES TO SPARE AND CLIMBED AWAY. LOOKING BACK FROM THE TURRET, RITCHIE SAW THE TORPEDO LUNGING UNDER THE SURFACE TOWARD THE TARGET. THEN...



AN ITALIAN SHELL SLAMMED INTO THE PORT ENGINE EVEN AS THE BEAUFORT CLIMBED AWAY. THE ENGINE INSTANTLY BURST INTO FLAMES AS TEMPEST PULLED FIERCELY ON THE RIGHT RUDDER TO STEADY THE LURCHING AIRCRAFT. . .



LABOURING ON ONE ENGINE, HOT OIL FUMES FILTERING THROUGH THE FUSELAGE, THE BEAUFORT LIMPED OUT OF RANGE OF THE CRUISER'S PUNISHING GUNS. TEMPEST THROTTLED BACK THE FAILING STARBOARD ENGINE AND CALLED HIS CREW.



THE ONLY COURSE WAS TO PUT THE STRICKEN AIRCRAFT DOWN ON THE SEA BEFORE THE STARBOARD ENGINE FAILED UNDER THE STRAIN AND SENT THEM PLUMMETING INTO AN UNCONTROLLED DIVE TO DISASTER.

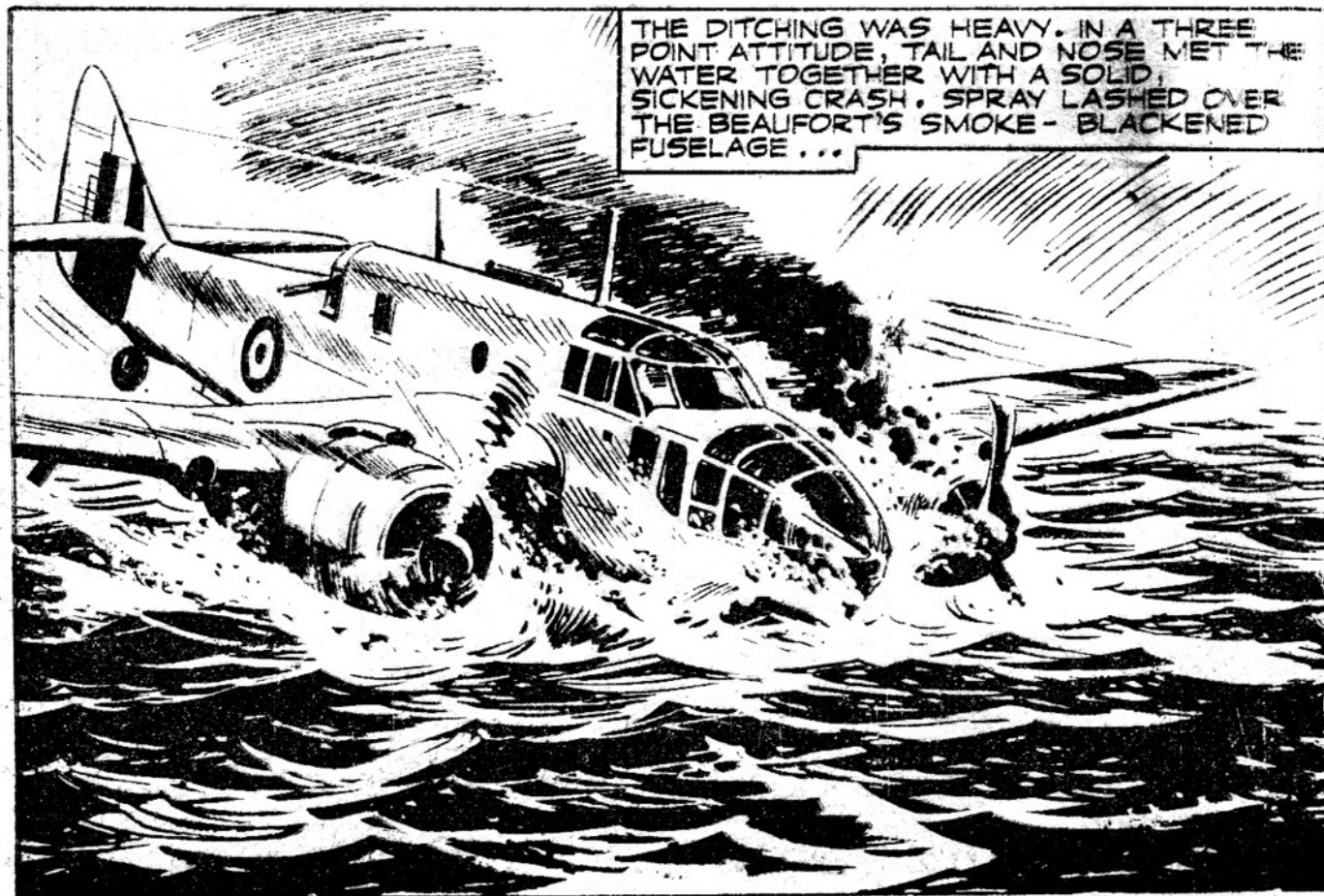


BILL SAVILL CLAMPED DOWN THE MORSE KEY TO TRANSMIT ITS CONTINUOUS NOTE UNTIL THE AIRCRAFT SUBMERGED. THERE WAS AN OUTSIDE CHANCE THAT A SHORE STATION WOULD GET A FIX ON IT AND PINPOINT THEIR POSITION.

I'M
PUTTING
HER DOWN —
NOW —



THE DITCHING WAS HEAVY. IN A THREE POINT ATTITUDE, TAIL AND NOSE MET THE WATER TOGETHER WITH A SOLID, SICKENING CRASH. SPRAY LASHED OVER THE BEAUFORT'S SMOKE-BLACKENED FUSELAGE...



Chapter 3. ORDEAL AT SEA

IN THAT FIRST SPLIT SECOND OF UTTER SILENCE AFTER THE DITCHING, RITCHIE MOLD DIVED THROUGH THE FREE GUN HATCH ON THE PORT SIDE AND WRENCHED SAVAGELY AT THE DINGHY RELEASE . . .



AS BILL CLIMBED THROUGH THE HATCH HE GLANCED FORWARD. THE NOSE OF THE BEAUFORT WAS ALREADY UNDERWATER BUT HE CAUGHT A GLIMPSE OF MOVEMENT IN THE GREEN GLOOM. THEN HE AND RITCHIE JUMPED . . .



STANDING ORDERS ON DITCHING PROCEDURE WERE STRICT: EACH MAN SAVED HIMSELF FIRST. BUT THE TWO GUNNERS LOOKED BACK AT THE WRECKED BEAUFORT IN ANGUISH...



THE AIRCRAFT HAD BROKEN ITS BACK IN THAT FATAL PLUNGE. IT SEEMED IMPOSSIBLE THAT ANYONE COULD LIVE IN THE DEEPLY-BURIED AND TRUNCATED WRECK, BUT...



AS THE BROKEN BEAUFORT TREMBLED UNSTEADILY UNDER HIS FEET, GERRY TEMPEST SHOUTED A WARNING AND PREPARED TO JUMP . . .

PUSH OFF, MEN, SHE'S GOING DOWN!



TEN SECONDS LATER AS TEMPEST REACHED THE DINGHY AND FLUNG AN ARM OVER THE SIDE, THE WALLOWING FRAGMENT OF A ONCE POWERFUL BOMBER LURCHED SPASMODICALLY LIKE A GREAT DROWNING ANIMAL . . .



WITH A SIGH, THE WATER CLOSED OVER THE BROKEN REMAINS OF THE BEAUFORT. THE IMMENSE STILLNESS OF BROODING SEA AND SKY OPPRESSED THE MEN IN THE DINGHY LIKE THE PREMONITION OF LINGERING DEATH...

COULD BE WORSE, CHAPS! NOW LET'S GET ORGANISED!



GERRY TEMPEST FELT THAT OPPRESSION — AND BRUSHED IT AWAY, FORCING CHEERFULNESS INTO HIS VOICE, HE OPENED THE NAVIGATION BAG... AND THE TOUGH AUSTRALIAN GUNNER GRIMLY WATCHED HIM.

EMERGENCY RATIONS... MAPS... VEREY PISTOL! NOW LET'S SEE WHERE WE ARE!

WE'RE UP THE CREEK, MISTER TEMPEST — THANKS TO YOU!



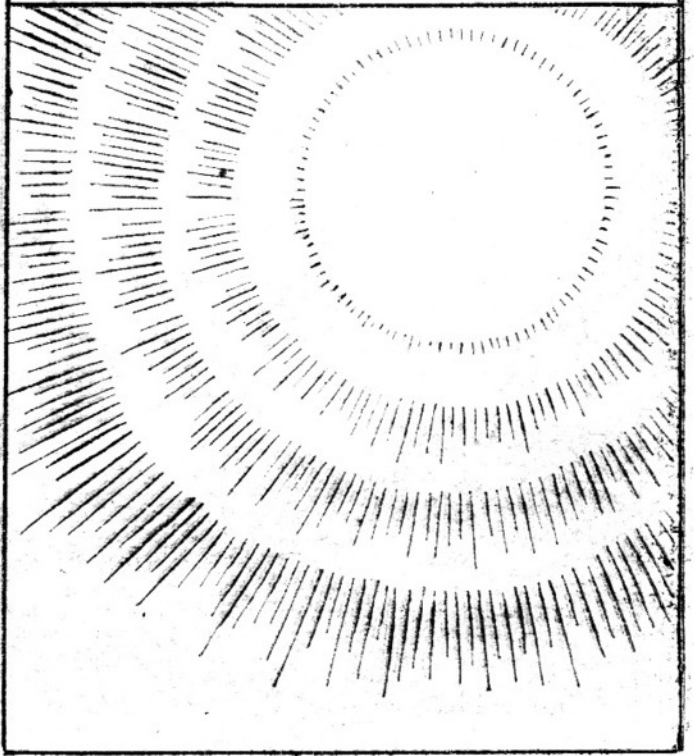
FOUR MEN WERE HUDDLED IN THAT TINY DINGHY ON A WASTE OF WATER AND ALREADY THE STRESS OF DANGER WAS STIRRING HATRED AND ANGER LIKE POISON IN THEIR TAUT MINDS.

I MAKE THE GREEK MAINLAND TO THE NORTH-EAST. WE'D BETTER START PADDLING IN WATCHES. COME ON, RITCHIE!

ANYTHING YOU SAY—SKIPPER!



THE MEN PADDOLED FOR TWO DAYS TOWARDS A SHORE THEY COULD NOT SEE. THEY WERE TWO DAYS OF HUNGER AND THIRST, TWO DAYS OF DWINDLING HOPE. AND THE SUN BURNED DOWN...



ON THE THIRD NIGHT AS GERRY TEMPEST KEPT A LOOKOUT AND THE OTHERS SLEPT UNEASILY, A DISTANT FAMILIAR SOUND BROUGHT THE COOL ENGLISHMAN TENSELY AWAKE...

AIRCRAFT ENGINES... OR AM I DELIRIOUS?



IT WAS THE ROAR OF AIRCRAFT ENGINES ALL RIGHT! GRIPPING THE VEREY PISTOL, TEMPEST PROBED THE DARKNESS AND PREPARED TO FIRE A DISTRESS SIGNAL. THEN HE SAW THE SHADOWY SHAPE TO THE NORTH — AND CHECKED —



IT WAS A GERMAN PLANE! TORN BY THE AGONY OF HIS LONE DECISION, THE FLIGHT LIEUTENANT HEARD THE HOSTILE AIRCRAFT PASS TWO HUNDRED FEET ABOVE. SHOULD HE FIRE THE VEREY PISTOL FOR HELP, AND SAFETY... AND CAPTIVITY?

I CAN'T DO IT! I'D RATHER STARVE TO DEATH OR DROWN OUT HERE THAN GIVE MYSELF UP TO THE HUNS! I CAN'T FIRE THE VEREY! LIGHT!



Tinfish With Wings

AS THOUGH FORCED DOWN BY A BRUTAL SUPERIOR WILL, THE HAND HOLDING THE VEREY PISTOL DROPPED. GERRY TEMPEST HAD MADE HIS DECISION... AND THE ROAR OF THE AIRCRAFT'S ENGINES DIED AWAY TO THE SOUTH, AND AS TEMPEST LOOKED BLEAKLY UP...

YOU SAW, CLIFF?

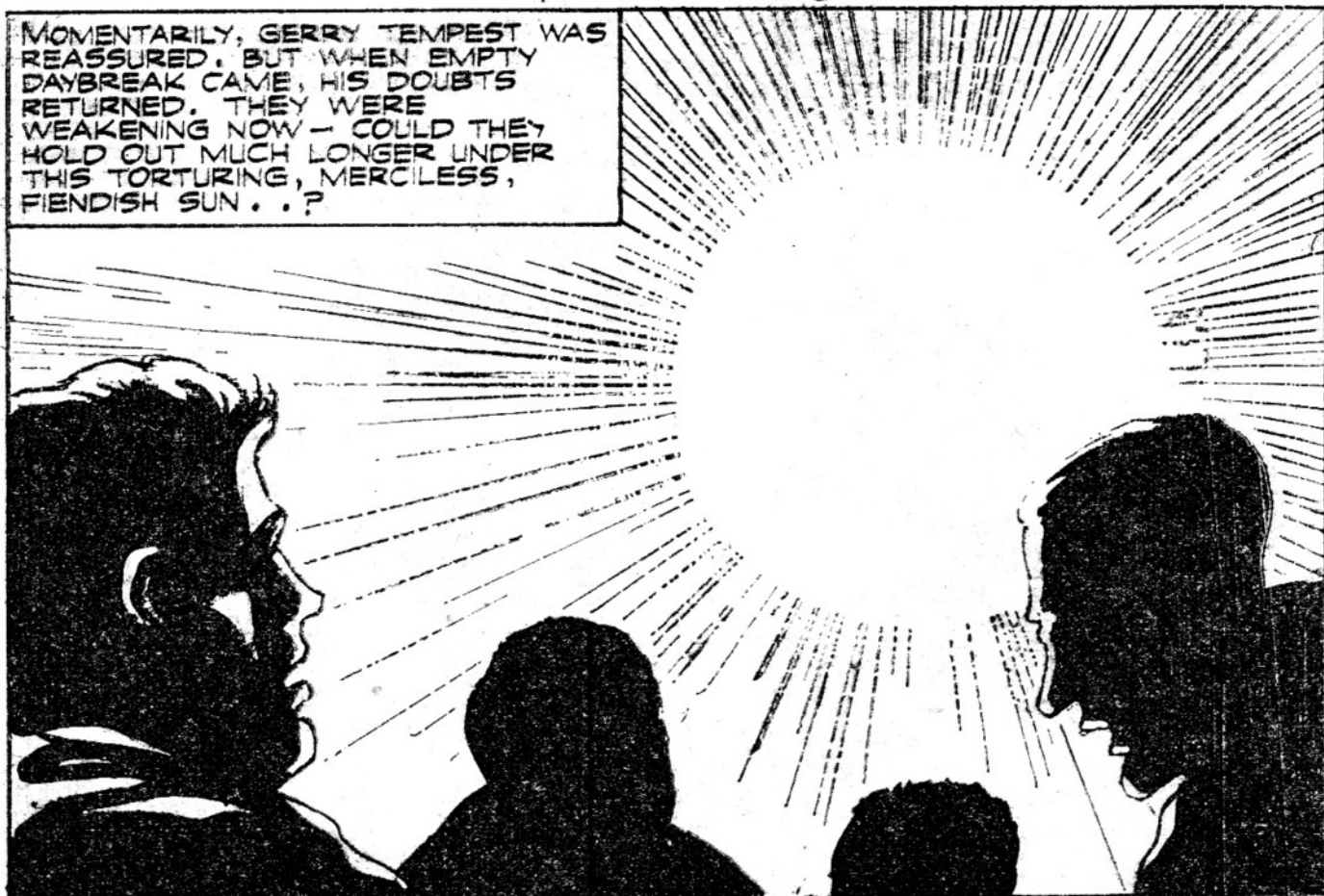
SAW, TEMPEST - AND I KNEW YOU'D LET THAT JERRY FLY PAST!

THE QUIET SOUTH AFRICAN HAD SEEN AND HEARD EVERYTHING, BUT NOW A GRAVE SMILE PASSED OVER HIS PAIN - TWISTED FACE...

YOU KNOW WHAT RITCHIE CALLS YOU, TEMPEST? 'THE DEATH-OR-GLORY BOY'. WELL, YOU MADE YOUR CHOICE THIS TIME, DIDN'T YOU - AND I RECKON IT'S DEATH! DON'T WORRY, I'M WITH YOU ALL THE WAY.

THANKS, CLIFF. WE'LL GET THROUGH - AND NOT TO ANY JERRY PRISON CAGE.

MOMENTARILY, GERRY TEMPEST WAS REASSURED. BUT WHEN EMPTY DAYBREAK CAME, HIS DOUBTS RETURNED. THEY WERE WEAKENING NOW — COULD THEY HOLD OUT MUCH LONGER UNDER THIS TORTURING, MERCILESS, FIENDISH SUN...?



ON THE FIFTH HOPELESS DAY, BILL SAVILL LIFTED HIS HEAD AND QUIETLY, AS THOUGH IT HAD BEEN JUST A CASUAL OBSERVATION, DROPPED A FEW EXPLOSIVE WORDS INTO THE PENT-UP SILENCE IN THE DINGHY!

FIVE DAYS... PERHAPS YOU SHOULD HAVE SIGNALLLED THAT JERRY AIRCRAFT WHICH FLEW OVER THE OTHER NIGHT, SKIPPER!

YOU HEARD IT, TOO?

WHAT'S THAT?



THIS LAST EVIDENCE OF HIS NEW SKIPPER'S DISREGARD FOR SAFETY BURNED LIKE ACID INTO RITCHIE MOLD'S TAUT NERVES. HIS VOICE UGLY WITH RAGE, HE FACED THE TALL ENGLISHMAN MENACINGLY...



YOU
CRAZY JOKER,
PASSING UP A
CHANCE TO
SAVE US SO
YOU CAN PIN A
GONG TO YOUR
BLAMED CHEST, AND
AFTER YOU'D PUT US
IN THE DRINK BECAUSE
YOU COULDN'T LET
WELL ALONE OVER
THAT CONVOY, WELL,
BY HEAVENS, YOU'RE
NOT GOING TO RISK
MY LIFE
AGAIN!

AS HIS NERVES SNAPPED, THE TOUGH AUSSIE LUNGED ACROSS THE DINGHY. HIS HANDS GROPED SAVAGELY FOR TEMPEST'S THROAT...

DON'T
BE A FOOL,
RITCHIE!



ICILY CALM AS HE ALWAYS WAS IN ACTION, TEMPEST FOUGHT OFF THE DELIRIOUS GUNNER'S ATTACK. AND NEAR THE CLAWING HANDS ON THE LIP OF THE DINGHY . . . A SMALL BIRD ALIGHTED!



SUDDENLY THE DINGHY WAS QUIET. FOUR DESPERATE MEN STARED WITH ACHING EYES AT THE TINY BIRD AND IN THEIR HEARTS GREW A SLOW AND FEARFUL JOY . . .



THE BIRD WAS A LINNET. IT MUST HAVE FLOWN FROM THE LAND, AND IT COULD NOT HAVE FLOWN FAR. STIFFLY, HARDLY DARING TO TRUST HIS WEARY EYES, BILL SAVILL CLIMBED TO HIS FEET . . .



HIS SHOUT BROUGHT THE OTHERS TREMBLING TO THEIR FEET. PERHAPS THREE MILES AWAY ACROSS THE GLOWERING SEA LAY THE SHADOWY COASTLINE OF GREECE. QUICKLY, GERRY TEMPEST CONSIDERED THE POSSIBILITIES AND MADE UP HIS MIND.

I'M GOING TO SWIM FOR IT, CHAPS! WE'LL NEVER MAKE IT BY PADDLING! YOU'RE IN COMMAND, CLIFF - TRY TO KEEP THE DINGHY IN THE SAME POSITION. I'LL GET HELP OUT TO YOU SOMEHOW - FRIEND OR FOE, IT DOESN'T MATTER NOW!



RAPPING OUT ORDERS IN A VOICE SUDDENLY CRISP, THE TALL ENGLISHMAN STRAPPED ON HIS MAE WEST AND POISED HIMSELF FOR THE DIVE. HE WOULD GIVE HIS MEN NO TIME TO OBJECT, OR HIMSELF TO DOUBT.

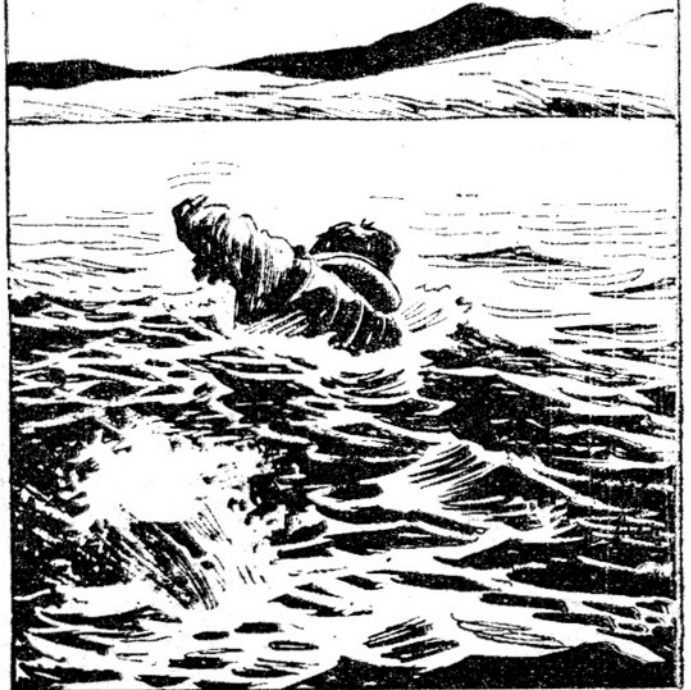
IS HE A DEATH-OR-GLORY BOY - OR THE COOLEST COVE I'VE EVER KNOWN? I'M DARNED IF I KNOW!



IT MIGHT TAKE A LONG TIME FOR THE EXHAUSTED SURVIVORS TO PADDLE THE DINGHY AGAINST THE OFF-SHORE CURRENTS TO THE BEACH. IT WOULD TAKE TEMPEST ONLY HOURS TO SWIM THERE — THOUGH THEY WOULD BE TERRIBLE HOURS.



AFTER THE FIRST GRUELLING HOUR, GERRY TEMPEST KEPT GOING ON SHEER WILL POWER ALONE. HIS BODY SLOGGED THROUGH THE WATER IN A PONDEROUS AND AUTOMATIC RHYTHM MEASURED BY PAIN AND NAUSEA...



ANOTHER HOUR PASSED... AND ANOTHER. NOW, NUMBLY RAISING HIS ACHING HEAD, TEMPEST SAW THE BEACH SUDDENLY CLOSE AT HAND. WITH A LAST SUPREME EFFORT, HE THRESHED INTO THE SHALLOWS...

MADE IT-SOMEHOW!
NOW I MUST GET HELP!



Chapter 4. GUERRILLA ACTION

THE GROUND SWAYING BENEATH HIS FEET, TEMPEST DRAGGED HIMSELF ACROSS THE SAND. BUT ALREADY DANGER WAS LOOSENING HIS CRAMPED MUSCLES. THIS WAS ENEMY-OCCUPIED GREECE EVEN IF HE HAD COME TO IT HELPLESS AND UNARMED. . .



THE BULLET SANG PAST HIS HEAD EVEN BEFORE HE HEARD THE CRACK OF THE RIFLE WHICH HAD FIRED IT. FLATTENED AGAINST THE BOULDER, THE STARTLED TEMPEST HEARD A VICIOUS CHATTER OF RIFLE FIRE AND THE SCREAM OF BRAKES TWO HUNDRED YARDS TO HIS RIGHT. CAUTIOUSLY HE INVESTIGATED...



BEYOND THE BOULDER LAY A NARROW DIRT ROAD AND THE GERMAN ARMY TRUCKS HAD OBVIOUSLY BEEN AMBUSHED BY A GREEK GUERILLA BAND. THE BRIEF BUT VICIOUS FIGHT FLARED AND DIED . . . AND GERRY TEMPEST LIMPED FORWARD . . .



THE HAGGARD FLIGHT LIEUTENANT KEPT HIS EYES ON THE BEARDED GIANT AS HE LEAPED DOWN FROM THE LEADING TRUCK. WOULD HE BE FRIENDLY - OR HOSTILE?

THE NAME'S SMITH, OLD CHAP! CAPTAIN HERBERT SMITH OF THE COLDSTREAM GUARDS - SECONDED TO LIAISON DUTIES WITH THIS VILLAINOUS BUNCH OF GREEK BRIGANDS! WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU?



TEMPEST HAD HEARD OF THESE BRAVE MEN WHO FOUGHT WITH THE GUERRILLAS IN MANY OCCUPIED COUNTRIES. HE THANKFULLY BLURTED OUT HIS PLEA... BUT SMITH SHOOK HIS HEAD REGRETFULLY...

NO CAN DO! FOR ONE THING WE'VE GOT NO BOAT! FOR ANOTHER, WE HAVE TO GRAB SOME AMMO FROM THE JERRIES IN THE HARBOUR DOWN THERE BEFORE THEY WAKE UP FROM THEIR NOON SIESTA! THAT'S WHY WE HI-JACKED THESE TRUCKS! SORRY, OLD CHAP!



BUT YOU JUST CAN'T LEAVE ME HERE!

A SUDDEN SURGE OF ANGRY ENERGY FLARED THROUGH GERRY TEMPEST'S TIRED BODY...

YOU'RE NOT GOING TO LEAVE ME! I'M COMING WITH YOU!

COME ON UP, THEN! I'VE GOT AN IDEA!



AS THE TRUCK GATHERED SPEED, SMITH BROUGHT OUT FOOD AND A WATER BOTTLE. WHEN THE FLIGHT LIEUTENANT HAD SWALLOWED THE ROUGH MEAL, THE GUERRILLA LEADER OUTLINED HIS PLAN.

THE HARBOUR'S FULL OF SMALL CRAFT. COULDN'T YOU GRAB ONE AND GET OUT TO THAT DINGHY OF YOURS? I'D LEND YOU A MAN AND RENDEZVOUS WITH YOU ASHORE LATER!

IT'S A CRAZY IDEA, SMITH — BUT I LIKE IT!

THE SIMPLICITY OF CAPTAIN SMITH'S PLAN PUT THE FINAL SHARP EDGE ON GERRY TEMPEST'S NEW-FOUND ENERGY! SUDDENLY HE WAS FIGHTING FIT AND HUNGRY FOR ACTION.

IF YOU'RE NOT FEELING UP TO IT, OLD BOY, YOU'D BETTER STAY IN THE TRUCK TILL WE'VE SOOTHED THE JERRIES.

NOT ON YOUR LIFE, SMITH! GIVE ME A GUN!



SWIFTLY THE TWO TRUCKS APPROACHED THE SLEEPY LITTLE SEAPORT. THE NAZI GUARDS OUTSIDE THE AMMUNITION SHED WATCHED THEIR DUST WITH LAZY DISAPPROVAL.

ACH, KARL IS IN A HURRY! IT IS FOOLISH TO DRIVE SO IN THIS HEAT!



THE NEXT MOMENT, BRUTAL FEAR BROUGHT THEM FRANTICALLY TO THEIR FEET, HANDS CLAWING AT RIFLES AS THE FEARED GUERRILLA FIGHTERS FROM THE HILLS LEAPED FROM THE SCREECHING TRUCKS.

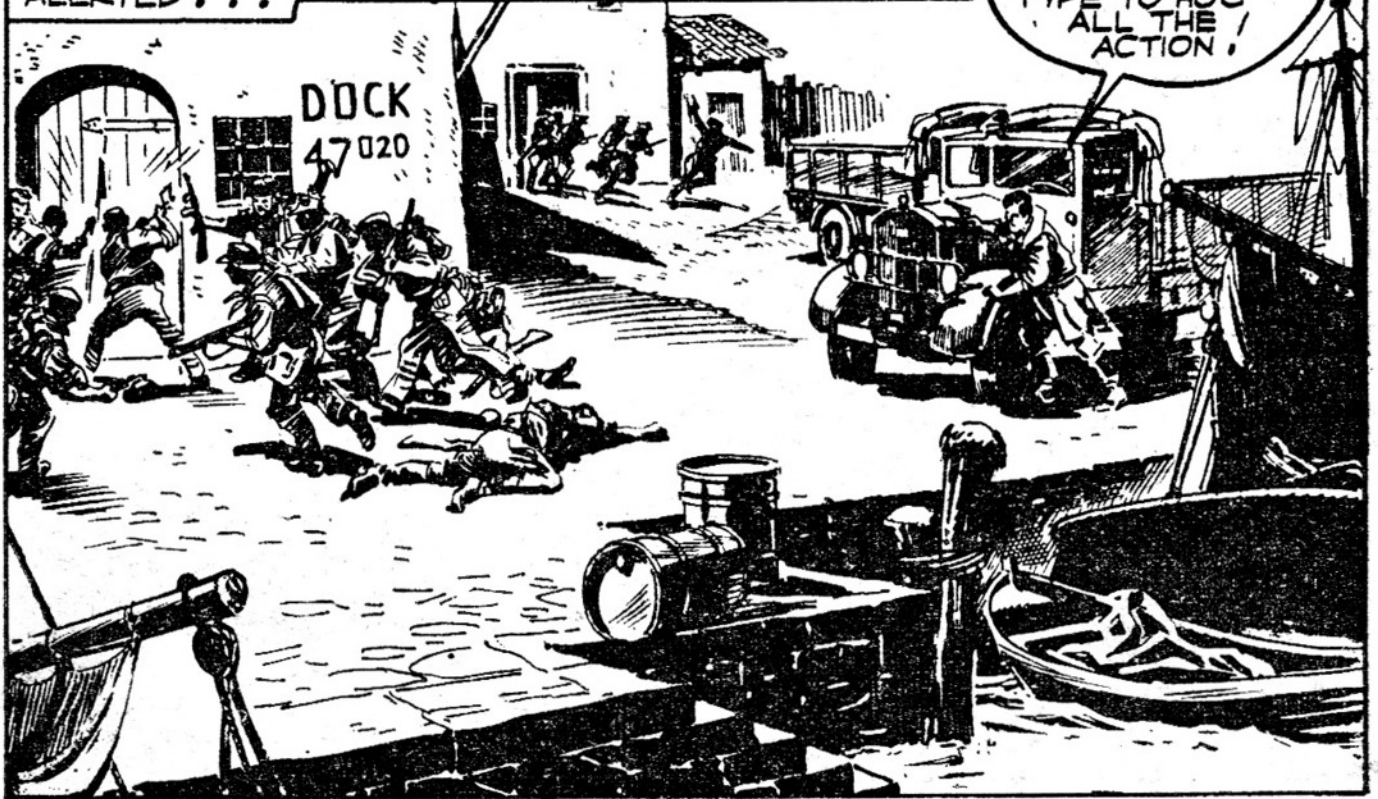
BREAK THE DOOR DOWN, QUICK! COVER THE REAR, TEMPEST!

AAGH!



ALONE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STATIONARY TRUCK, GERRY TEMPEST COVERED THE REAR AND LISTENED ENVIOUSLY TO THE SOUNDS OF FIGHTING FROM THE SHED. BUT ALREADY THE GERMAN GUARDS WERE ALERTED . . .

COVER THE REAR, HE SAYS! JUST LIKE AN ARMY TYPE TO HOG ALL THE ACTION!



THE NAZI OFFICER KNEW BETTER THAN TO FIGHT THE GUERRILLAS IN THE OPEN. HIS PLAN WAS TO TAKE COVER BEHIND THE TRUCKS AND MOW DOWN THE GREEKS AS THEY EMERGED FROM THE SHED. BUT ONE MAN STOOD IN HIS WAY - AND HIS NAME WAS TEMPEST!

AAGH!

KEEP COMING, JERRIES, I'M JUST GETTING MY EYE IN!



TWO BULLETS, FIRED BY TEMPEST WITH LETHAL COOLNESS, STRUCK DOWN THE OFFICER AND THE LEADING GERMAN SOLDIER. THE SHOTS BROUGHT SMITH AND HIS MEN RUNNING, AND THE BRIEF FLICKER OF ENEMY RESISTANCE DIED . . .



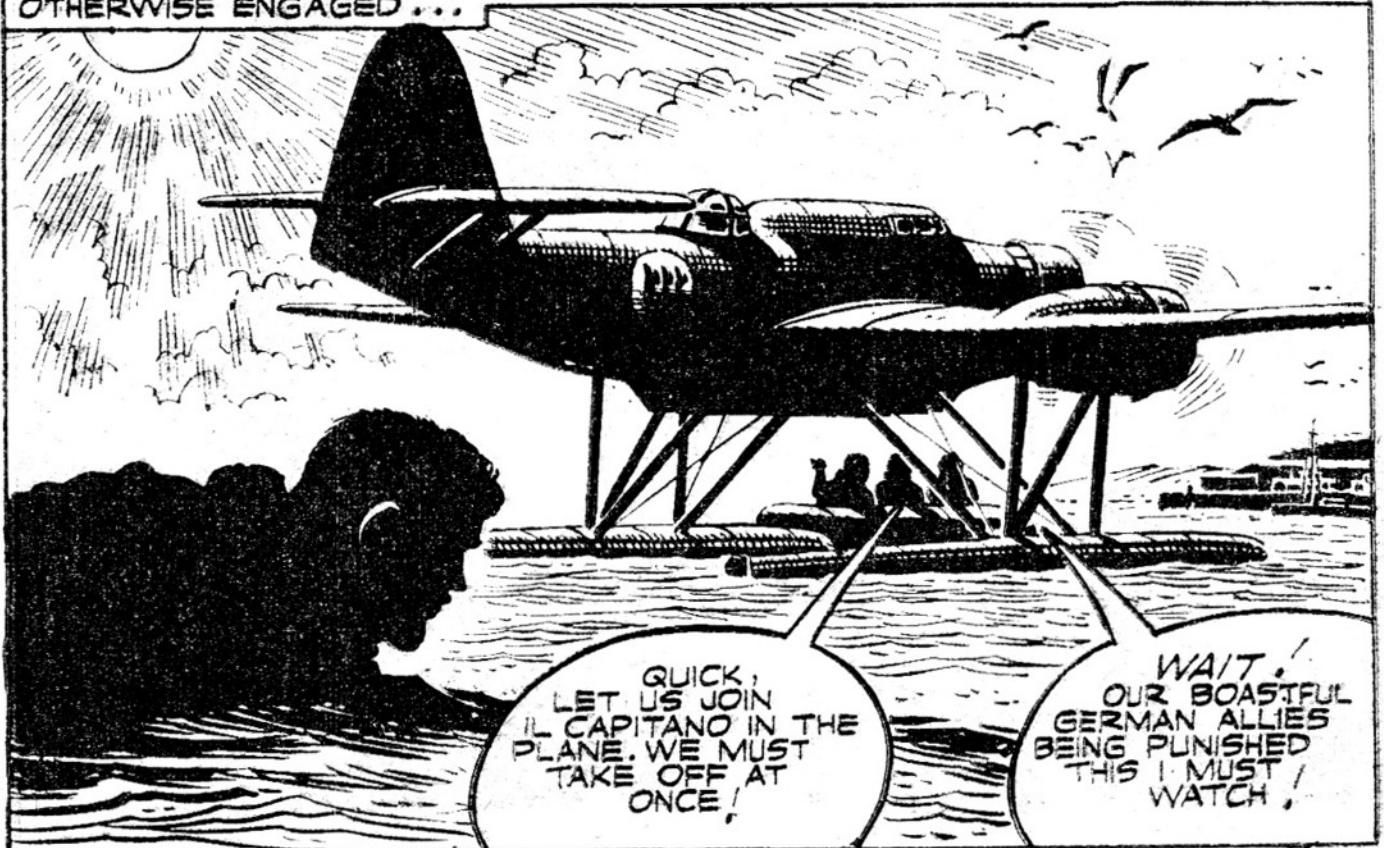
THE FLIGHT LIEUTENANT HAD NOT FORGOTTEN HIS HELPLESS COMRADES IN THE DINGHY, DESPITE THE EXCITEMENT OF THE ACTION. NOW HE SPRANG TO THE QUAYSIDE - AND PAUSED WITH NARROWED EYES . . .



OUT THERE ON THE SUNLIT WATER FLOATED A SEAPLANE. THE PROPELLERS OF ITS THREE RADIAL ENGINES GENTLY TURNING. TEMPEST RECOGNIZED IT AS AN ITALIAN CANT Z306B, AND THE DAREDEVIL IDEA IT GAVE HIM HAD NO SOONER CROSSED HIS MIND THAN HE ACTED ON IT...



FLOGGING MUSCLES STILL ACHING FROM HIS RECENT MARATHON SWIM, TEMPEST DROVE HIMSELF THROUGH THE CALM WATER TOWARDS THE SEAPLANE. THE ENEMY EYES WHICH MIGHT HAVE SPOTTED HIM WERE OTHERWISE ENGAGED...



THE SHOOTING ON THE QUAY HAD SET THE GARRULOUS ITALIAN AIRCREW CHATTERING EXCITEDLY. MIXED WITH FEAR OF THE FEROCIOUS GUERRILLA FIGHTERS WAS THE DELIGHT OF SEEING THE DISCOMFITURE OF THEIR BULLYING GERMAN ALLIES, AND UNSEEN ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE AIRCRAFT . . .



THREE
EYETIES IN THE
BOAT . . . THAT
PROBABLY LEAVES ONE
INSIDE THE PLANE. WELL,
IT'S WORTH
A TRY!

ABOVE TEMPEST'S HEAD AS HE CLUNG TO THE FLOAT WAS AN OPEN HATCH IN THE FUSELAGE. REVOLVER IN HAND, THE DAREDEVIL ENGLISHMAN SWUNG HIMSELF SILENTLY INTO THE AIRCRAFT'S CREW COMPARTMENT.



WHERE
ARE THOSE
FOOLS? DO
THEY WANT TO
BE CAPTURED BY
THE GREEK
WOLVES?

THE SEAPLANE'S FIRST PILOT WAS BELLOWING IMPATIENTLY TO HIS CREW. THE SHOOTING ON THE QUAY HAD ALARMED HIM. THIS WAS NO PLACE FOR A PEACE-LOVING ITALIAN. HE TURNED IN HIS SEAT AND HIS VOICE STRANGLERED IN HIS THROAT.

SAPRISTI!

ALL RIGHT, ANTONIO, DON'T MAKE A MOVE!



TEMPEST'S EYES WERE COLD AND DEADLY, THE HAND HOLDING THE GUN UNWAVERING. GRIMLY HE MOTIONED THE GOGGLING ITALIAN TO SILENCE... STILL CHATTERING, THE CREW CLAMBERED INTO THE CREW COMPARTMENT... **AND GAPED...**

COME ON IN, WOPS! AND DON'T TRY ANY TRICKS OR IL CAPITANO HERE WILL GET HURT! YOU'VE GOT EXACTLY FIVE MINUTES TO GET THIS KITE IN THE AIR!



OBEY THE INGLESE, FOR PITY'S SAKE!

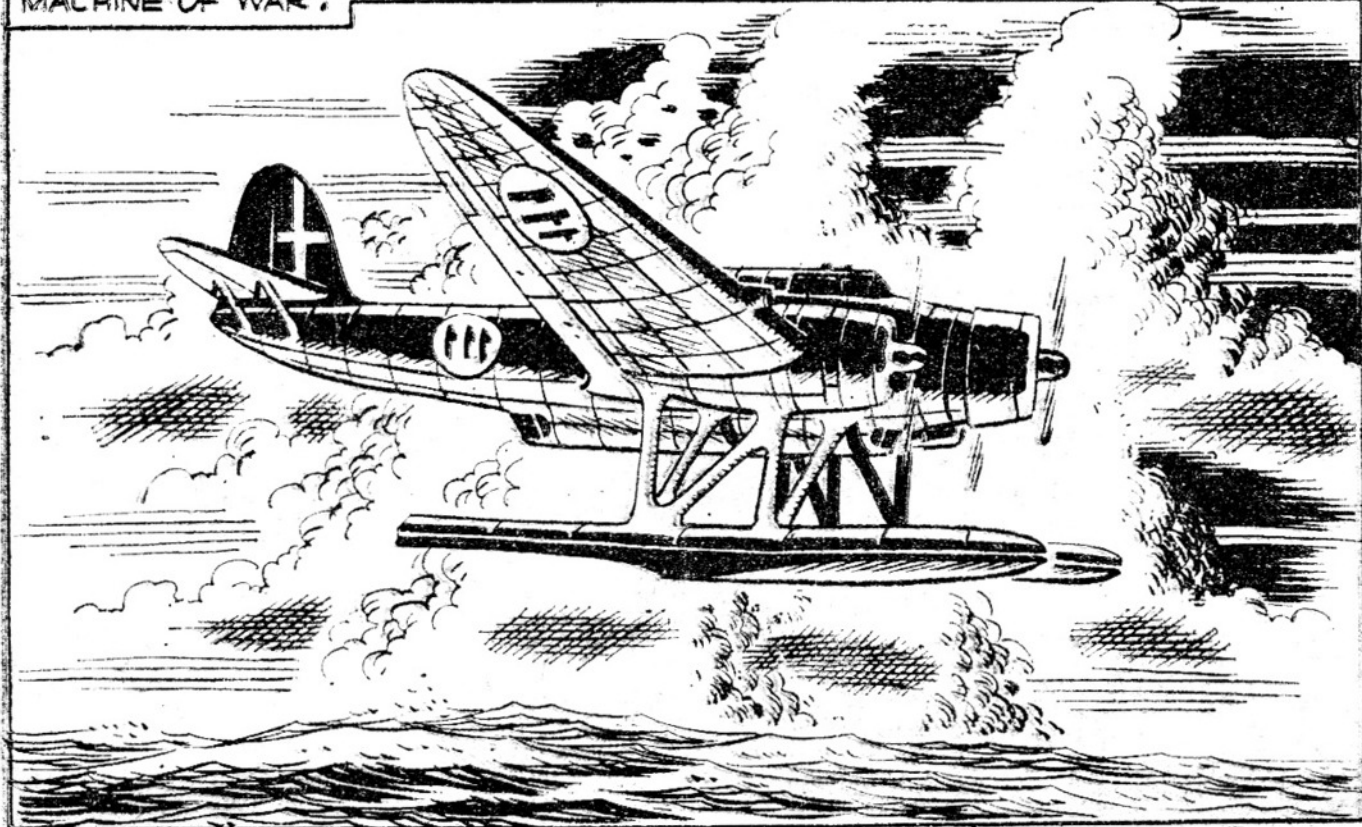
THE ITALIANS HAD NO STOMACH FOR A FIGHT, THE AGONY IN THEIR CAPTAIN'S VOICE AND THE PISTOL AT HIS HEAD WERE MORE THAN ENOUGH TO DETER THEM. SULLENLY THEY WENT TO THEIR POSTS, AND FIVE HUNDRED YARDS AWAY ON THE QUAYSIDE, SMITH WATCHED THE SEAPLANE TAKE OFF...



THE TOUGH CAPTAIN SMITH HAD KNOWN THE FLIGHT LIEUTENANT FOR ONLY A CROWDED SIXTY MINUTES BUT HE HAD RECOGNIZED A KINDRED SPIRIT. GERRY TEMPEST WAS A MAN WHO KNEW WHAT HE WANTED... AND HE USUALLY GOT IT!



ITS THREE ENGINES HAMMERING, THE HEAVY SEAPLANE CLIMBED OVER THE OPEN SEA AND BANKED ON TO A NORTHERLY COURSE. ONE GUN IN THE COOL HAND OF A MASTERFUL MAN CONTROLLED FOUR Sullen ENEMIES AND THEIR MACHINE OF WAR.



FIVE MILES AWAY TO THE NORTH, THE RUBBER DINGHY FLOATED MOTIONLESS ON THE GLASSY SEA BENEATH THE BLAZING SUN. THE THREE MEN IN IT, HOPE DRAINING AWAY AS THE BURNING HOURS PASSED, HAD COME FACE TO FACE WITH DEATH . . .



THE DRONE OF ENGINES TO THE SOUTH BROUGHT THEM EXCITEDLY TO THEIR FEET IN THE SALT-CAKED DINGHY... BUT AS THE AIRCRAFT SURGED INTO SIGHT, THEIR FIRST WILD ELATION TURNED TO THE BITTERNESS OF DEFEAT...



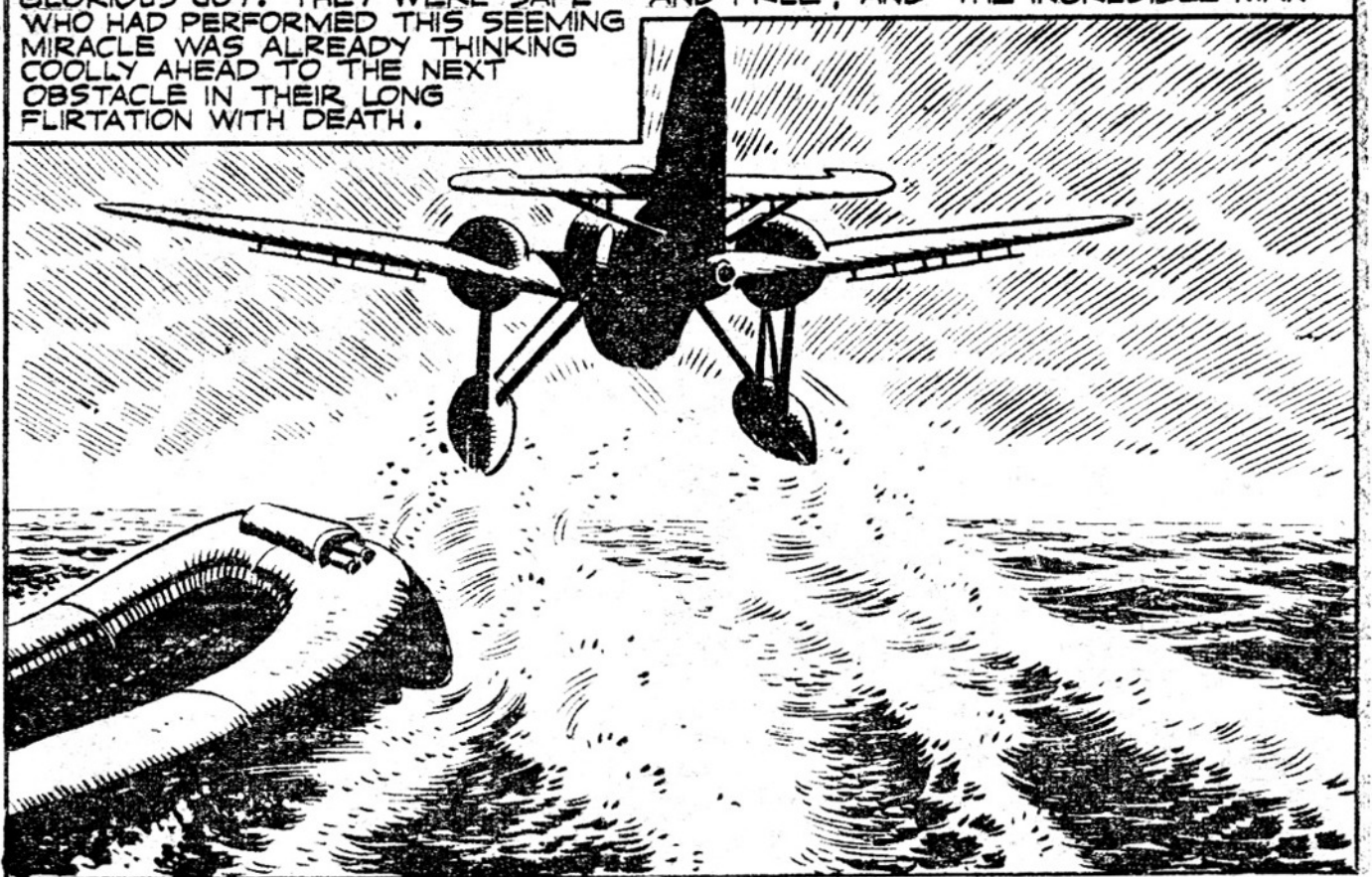
RESCUE—AND CAPTIVITY—WERE AT HAND. THE ITALIAN AIRCRAFT TOUCHED DOWN FOUR HUNDRED YARDS AWAY AND TAXIED TOWARDS THE DINGHY. AND RITCHIE MOLD'S VOICE WAS SOUR AS THEY CLIMBED ABOARD...



SULLENLY, THE THREE SURVIVORS WERE HELPED INTO THE CANT SEAPLANE BY THE ITALIAN FLIGHT ENGINEER. BLINKING IN THE UNNATURAL DIMNESS OF THE FUSELAGE, THEY GLANCED TOWARDS THE PILOT . . .



THE FIRST BLANK INCOMPREHENSION TURNED SUDDENLY TO A BLINDING AND GLORIOUS JOY. THEY WERE SAFE — AND FREE! AND THE INCREDIBLE MAN WHO HAD PERFORMED THIS SEEMING MIRACLE WAS ALREADY THINKING COOLLY AHEAD TO THE NEXT OBSTACLE IN THEIR LONG FLIRTATION WITH DEATH.



THE CANT WAS ALREADY AIRBORNE. NOW THE DECISION AS TO ITS DESTINATION HAD TO BE MADE — AND IT WAS A DECISION SO HAZARDOUS THAT GERRY TEMPEST WOULD NOT MAKE IT ALONE.

BUT HOW THE DEVIL DID YOU MANAGE IT, SKIPPER?

IT'S A LONG STORY, THEO! RIGHT NOW, WE'VE GOT TO DECIDE WHERE TO HEAD FOR. IT'S A GRIM CHOICE AND I'M NOT GOING TO PERSUADE ANYBODY! EITHER WE PUT THIS KITE DOWN AT SOME JERRY BASE UP THE GREEK COAST — OR WE TRY TO MAKE MALTA!

THE YOUNG ENGLISHMAN HAD LED HIS CREW INTO SOME HAIR-RAISING RISKS BUT THEY WERE JUST BEGINNING TO LEARN THAT A COOL HEAD HAD CALCULATED EACH OF THOSE RISKS BEFORE THEY HAD BEEN TAKEN. AND THIS TIME, THE CHOICE WAS THEIRS...

MALTA NIENTE! SPITFIRE! ACK-ACK-ACK-ACK - ITALIANO AIRCRAFT KAPUT! PETROL TANKS DRY! MALTA NIENTE!

WELL, YOU HEARD HIM, CHAPS! IT'LL BE A SHAKY DO. IF THE PETROL TANKS DON'T RUN DRY BEFORE WE REACH MALTA, THE SPIT BOYS WILL BE GUNNING FOR US. SHALL WE PLAY SAFE AND HEAD BACK TO GREECE?

RITCHIE MOLD HESITATED FOR A BRIEF INSTANT. HIS DISTRUST OF THE NEW SKIPPER AND HIS DAREDEVIL METHODS HAD BEEN SHAKEN BY TEMPEST'S MIRACULOUS RESCUE ACT IN THE CANT. AND NOW, SUDDENLY, HIS OWN TOUGH BELLIGERENCE SPOKE FOR HIM...

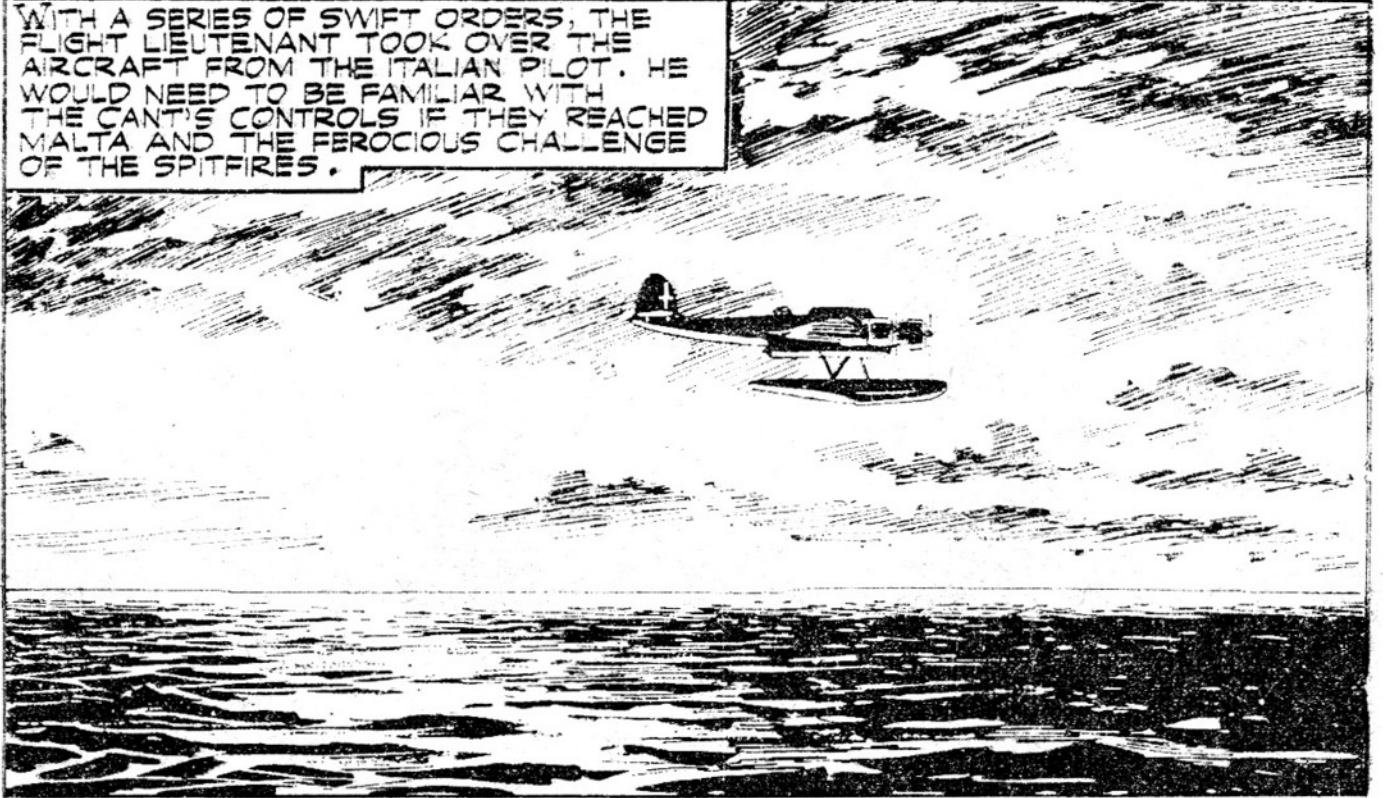


TEMPEST GRINNED GRATEFULLY AT HIS AUSTRALIAN GUNNER. THIS WAS PROBABLY THE GRAVEST RISK HE HAD TAKEN SINCE THE BEAUFORT HAD LEFT MALTA — AND IT HAD PAID OFF! THE HOSTILE RITCHIE MOLD WAS ON HIS SIDE AT LAST!



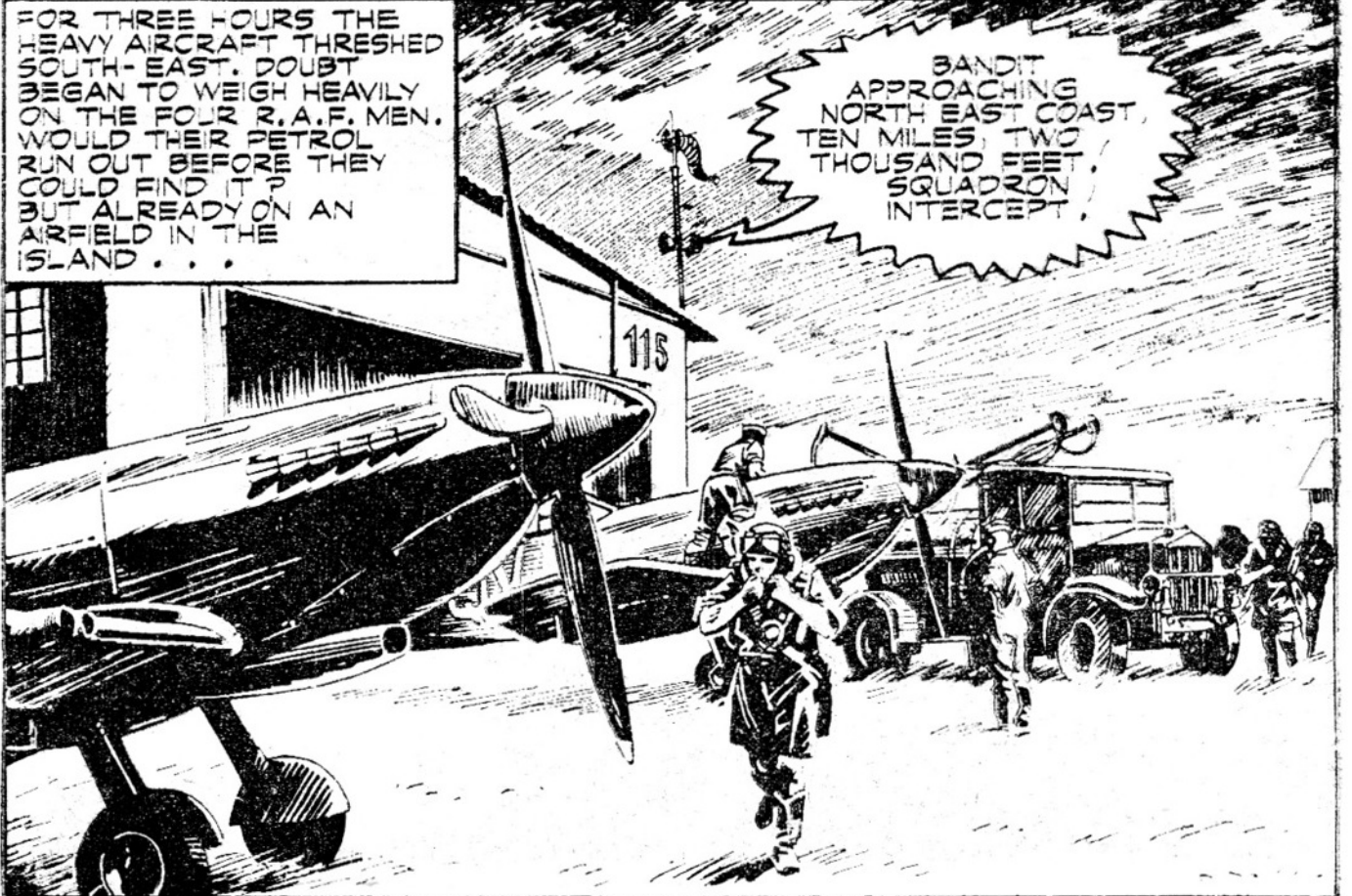
Chapter 5. SPITFIRES' TARGET

WITH A SERIES OF SWIFT ORDERS, THE FLIGHT LIEUTENANT TOOK OVER THE AIRCRAFT FROM THE ITALIAN PILOT. HE WOULD NEED TO BE FAMILIAR WITH THE CANT'S CONTROLS IF THEY REACHED MALTA AND THE FEROCIOUS CHALLENGE OF THE SPITFIRES.



FOR THREE HOURS THE HEAVY AIRCRAFT THRESHED SOUTH-EAST. DOUBT BEGAN TO WEIGH HEAVILY ON THE FOUR R.A.F. MEN. WOULD THEIR PETROL RUN OUT BEFORE THEY COULD FIND IT? BUT ALREADY ON AN AIRFIELD IN THE ISLAND...

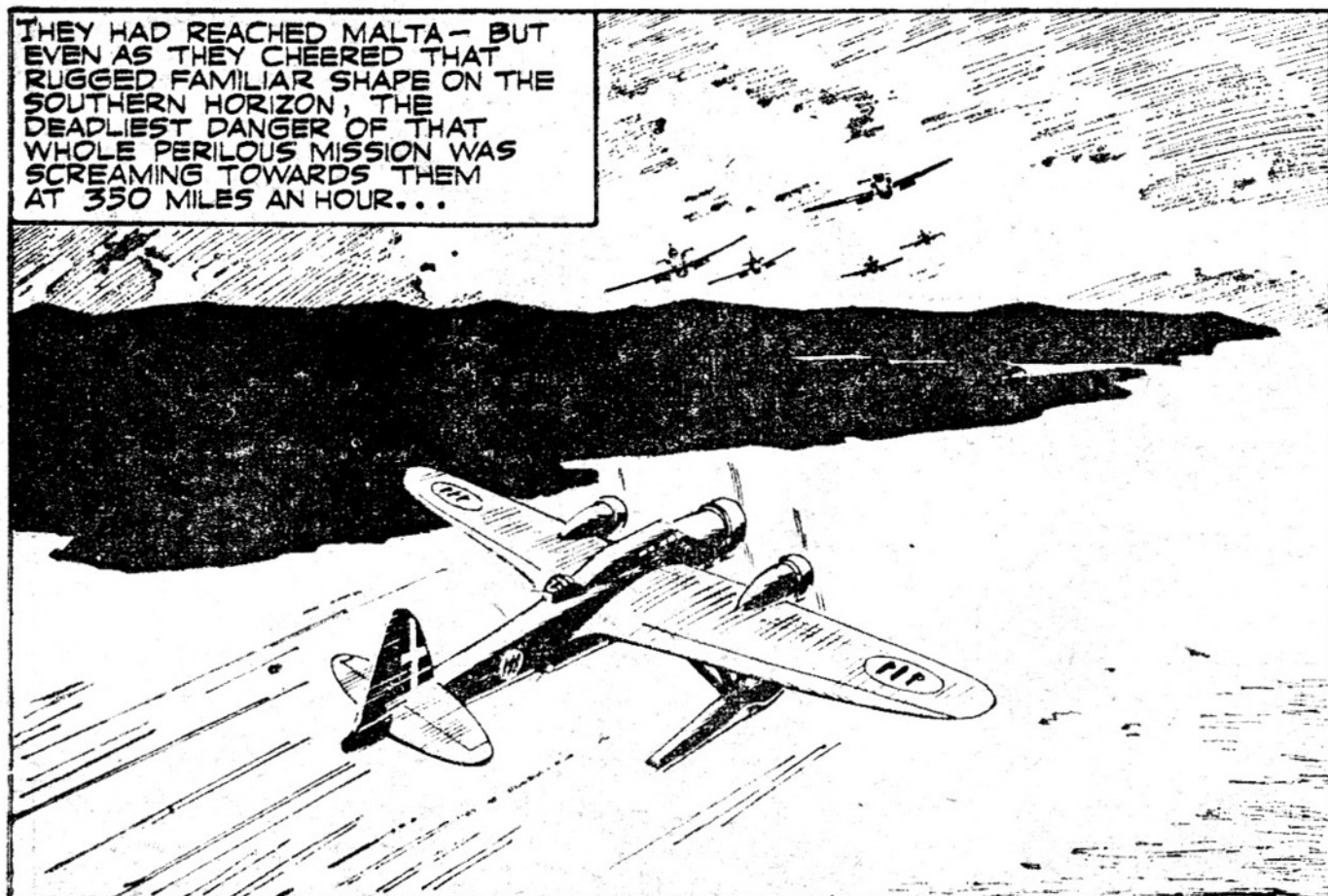
BANDIT
APPROACHING
NORTH EAST COAST,
TEN MILES, TWO
THOUSAND FEET.
SQUADRON
INTERCEPT.

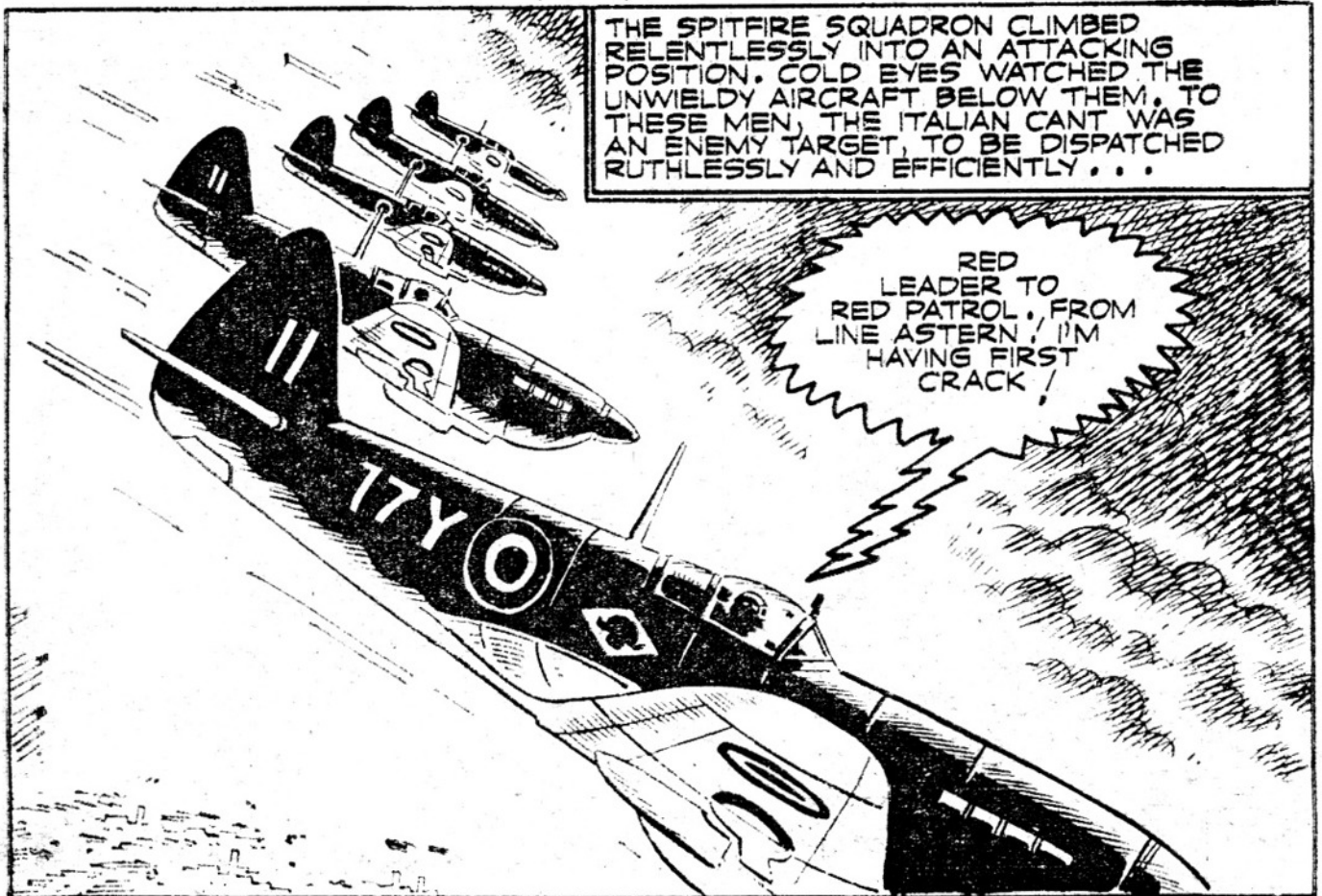


AT THE SAME MOMENT AS THE SQUADRON OF SPITFIRES ROARED THREATENINGLY OFF THE RUNWAY TEN MILES TO THE SOUTH-EAST, THE MEN IN THE ITALIAN SEAPLANE WERE ROUSED FROM THEIR GLOOMY TENSION BY A WILD SHOUT FROM THE AUSTRALIAN GUNNER . . .



THEY HAD REACHED MALTA - BUT EVEN AS THEY CHEERED THAT RUGGED FAMILIAR SHAPE ON THE SOUTHERN HORIZON, THE DEADLIEST DANGER OF THAT WHOLE PERILOUS MISSION WAS SCREAMING TOWARDS THEM AT 350 MILES AN HOUR...





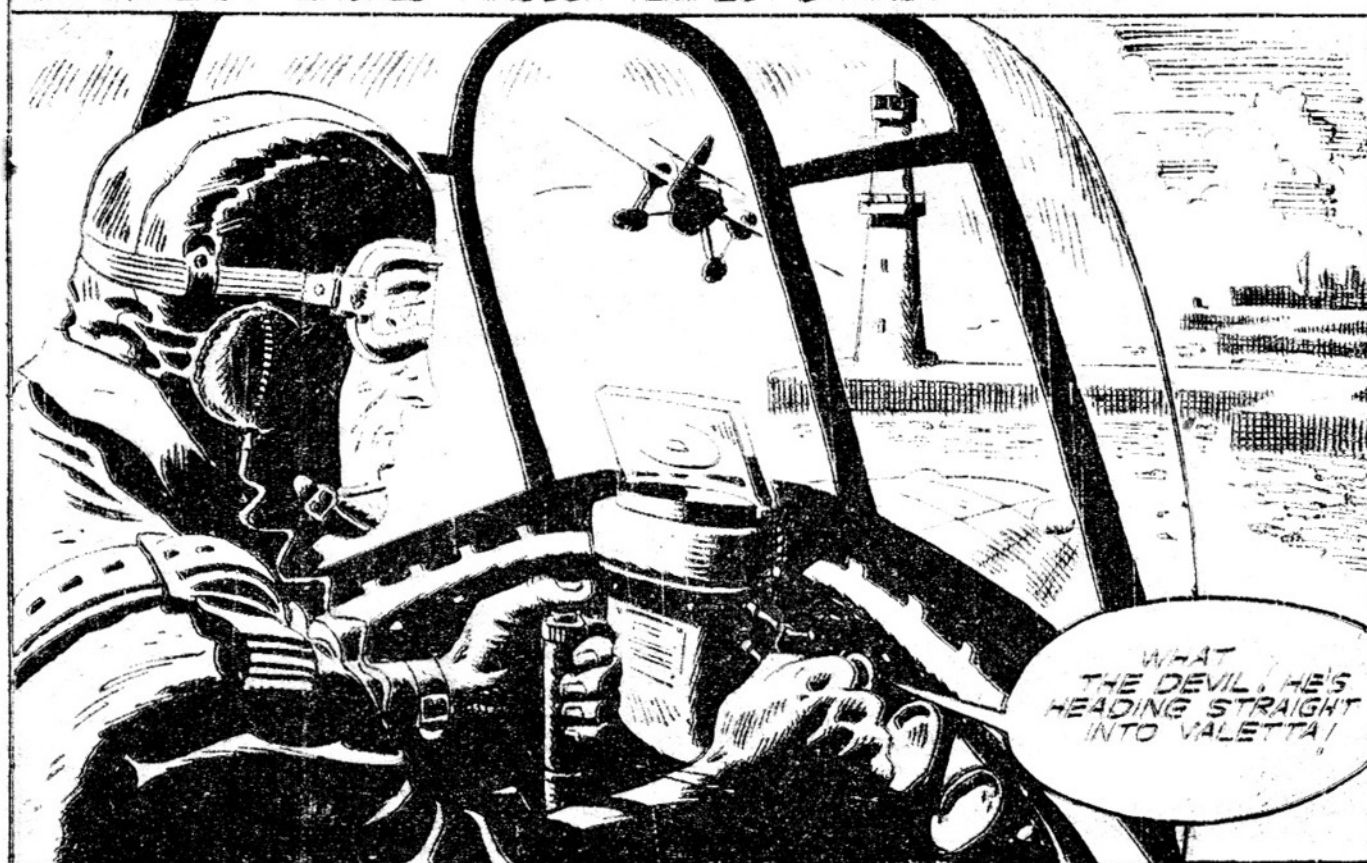
IN THE CANT, RITCHIE SWUNG THE TURRET GUNS IN THE RECOGNIZED SIGNAL OF SURRENDER. BUT THE SPITFIRES WERE TAKING NO CHANCES.

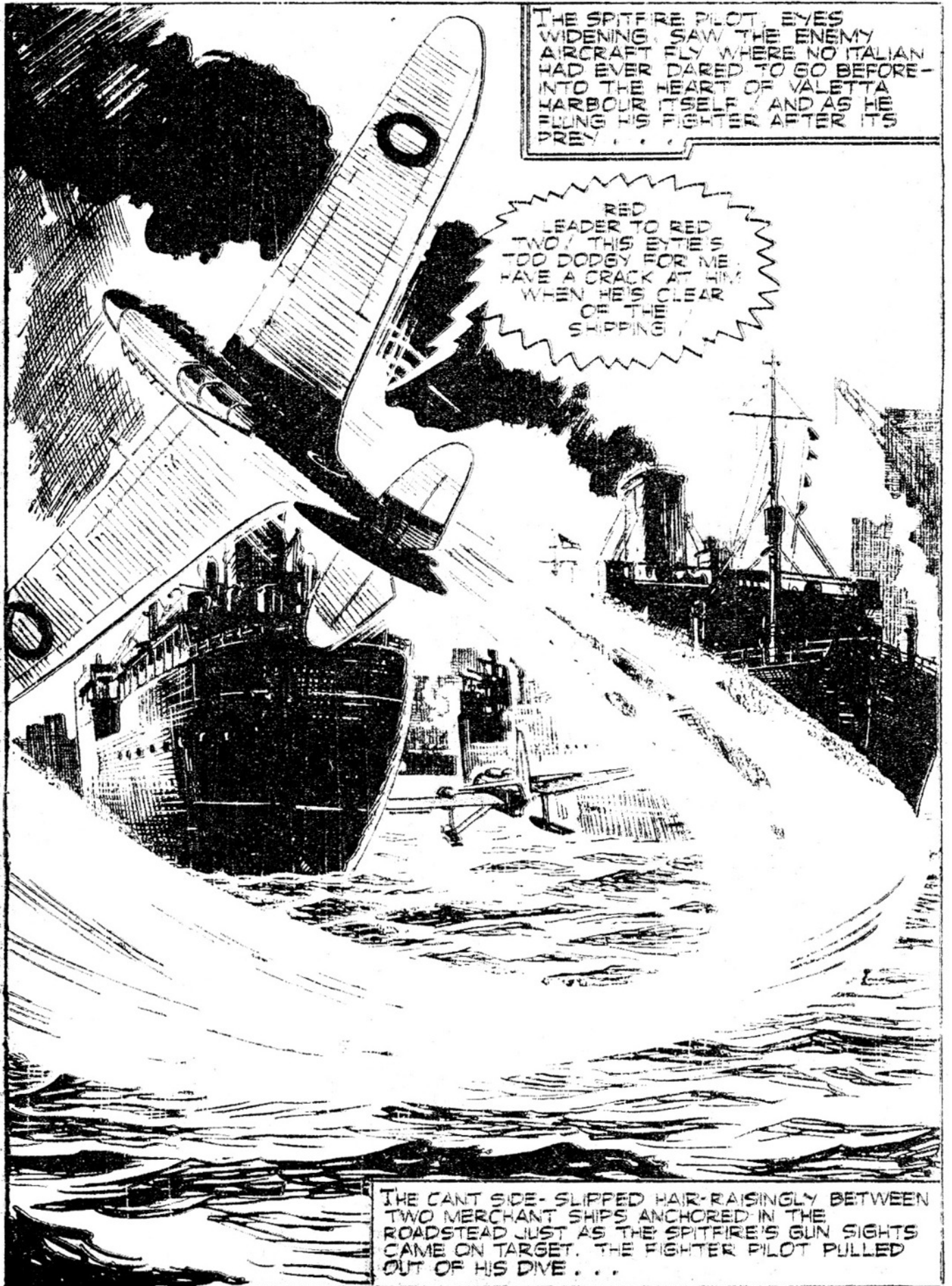


IN LINE ASTERN, THE DEADLY FIGHTERS TORE DOWN ON THEIR PREY. EVEN IN THAT SPLIT SECOND OF FEARFUL PERIL, GERRY TEMPEST HAD A GRIN AND A WRY JOKE FOR HIS CYNICAL AUSTRALIAN GUNNER . . .



A DARING PLAN TO OUTWIT THE VENGEFUL SPITFIRES WITHOUT FIRING A SHOT HAD ALREADY FLASHED THROUGH TEMPEST'S MIND.





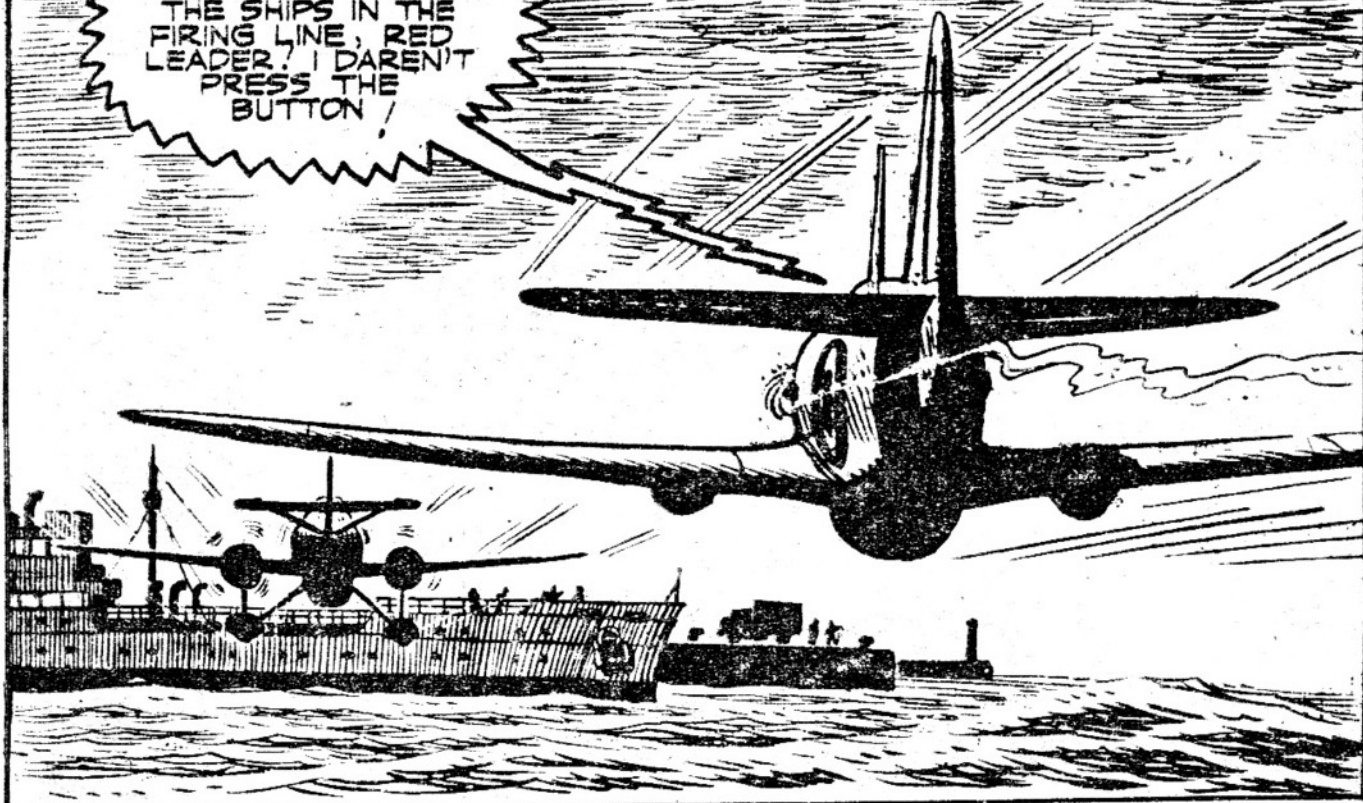
THE SPITFIRE PILOT, EYES
WIDENING, SAW THE ENEMY
AIRCRAFT FLY WHERE NO ITALIAN
HAD EVER DARED TO GO BEFORE—
INTO THE HEART OF VALETTA
HARBOUR ITSELF. AND AS HE
FELLING HIS FIGHTER AFTER ITS
PREY . . .

RED
LEADER TO RED
TWO / THIS EYE'S
TOO DODGY FOR ME.
HAVE A CRACK AT HIM
WHEN HE'S CLEAR
OF THE
SHIPPING.

THE CANT SIDE-SLIPPED HAIR-RAISINGLY BETWEEN
TWO MERCHANT SHIPS ANCHORED IN THE
ROADSTEAD JUST AS THE SPITFIRE'S GUN SIGHTS
CAME ON TARGET. THE FIGHTER PILOT PULLED
OUT OF HIS DIVE . . .

THE SECOND SPITFIRE RENEWED THE ATTACK...

HE
KEEPS PUTTING
THE SHIPS IN THE
FIRING LINE, RED
LEADER! I DAREN'T
PRESS THE
BUTTON!



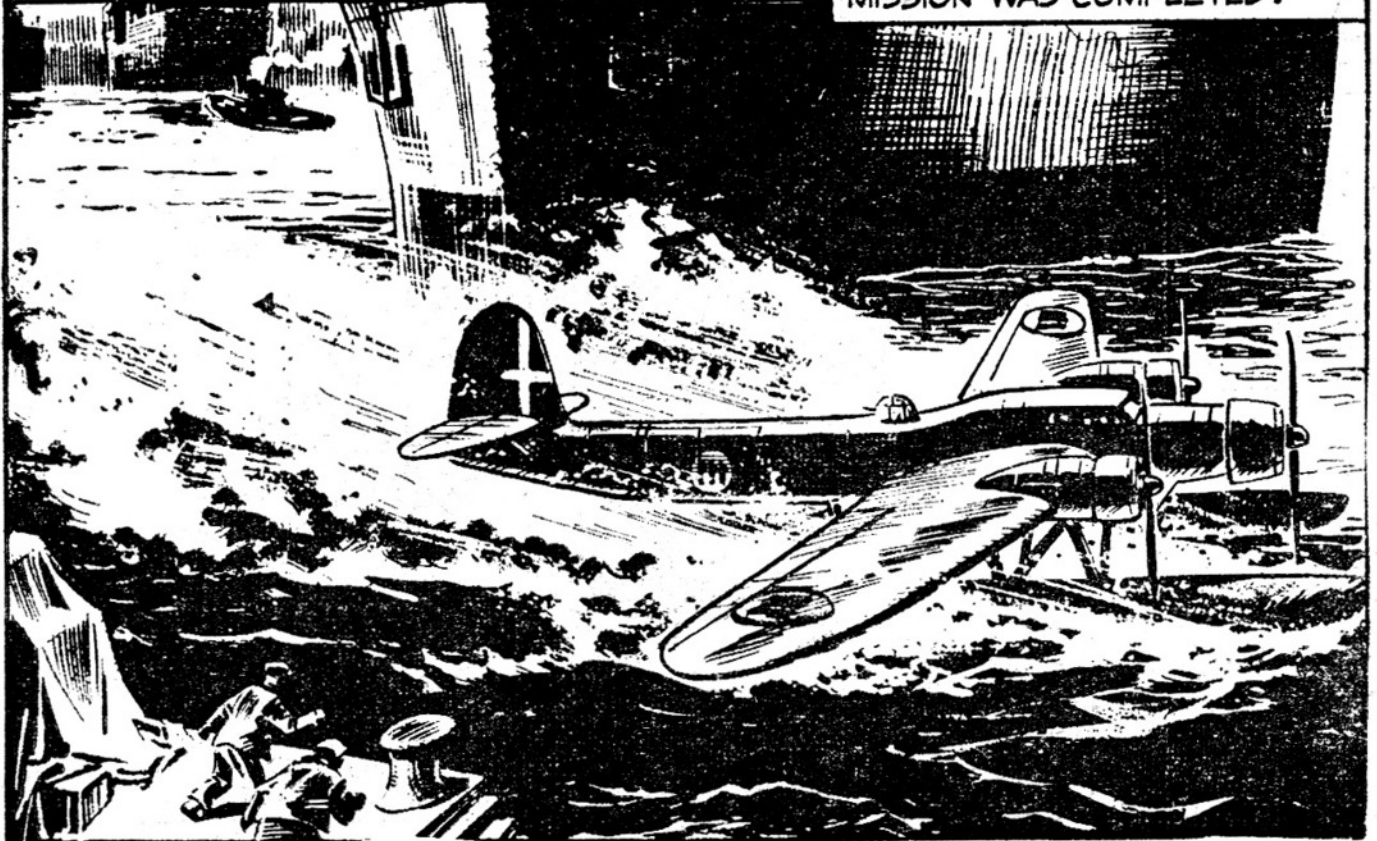
TEMPEST'S PLAN WAS WORKING BRILLIANTLY. BY THREADING BETWEEN THE CROWDED SHIPPING IN THE HARBOUR, HE FORCED THE FIGHTERS TO HOLD THEIR FIRE FOR FEAR OF HITTING THE MERCHANT SHIPS. ONE AFTER THE OTHER THE FUMING SPITFIRE PILOTS BROKE



THE TOUGH AUSTRALIAN GUNNER WAS SO EXCITED BY HIS SKIPPER'S COOLLY-CONCEIVED AND DARINGLY-EXECUTED PLAN THAT IN THE WILD HEAT OF THE MOMENT HE FORGOT THE CONTEMPT HE HAD ONCE FELT FOR TROUBLE-SHOOTERS . . .



THE COOL ENGLISHMAN WEIGHED ALL THE RISKS HE TOOK, AND NOW AS THE BAFFLED SPITFIRES CLIMBED OUT OF THE FIRING LINE, HE KNEW THAT HIS MISSION WAS COMPLETED.



AS THE ITALIAN SEAPLANE TOUCHED DOWN, THE FOUR SURVIVORS FLUNG OPEN THE HATCHES AND RAN OUT WAVING ON TO THE WINGS. THE PILOT OF THE DIVING SPITFIRE FLIPPED HIS FIRING BUTTON TO SAFETY AND TOOK A DEEP BREATH...

WELL, I'LL BE BLOWED - THAT EXPLAINS IT! THOSE ARE R.A.F. BOYS! I DIDN'T THINK ANY DARNED EYIE COULD MAKE A FOOL OF THE SQUADRON LIKE THAT!

ONLY THE DARING AND SKILL OF GERRY TEMPEST HAD BROUGHT HIS CREW THROUGH THE LAST TERRIBLE ORDEAL UNDER THE HUNGRY GUNS OF THEIR OWN COMRADES!

WHAT THE DEUCE IS GOING ON HERE?

FLIGHT LIEUTENANT TEMPEST REPORTING, SIR: WE LOST OUR BEAUFORT OFF SAPIENZA FIVE DAYS AGO! THIS WAS THE ONLY THING WE COULD FIND TO BRING US BACK!





THE DOUBLE FEAT OF SINKING AN ENEMY CRUISER AND CAPTURING AN ITALIAN AIRCRAFT HAD EARNED TEMPEST AND HIS CREW MUCH-COVED MEDALS, A CELEBRATION PARTY, AND SOME JOCLAR REMARKS...

WHAT'S THAT THEY'RE CALLING YOU, SERGEANT? 'THE DEATH-OR-GLORY BOY'?

I ASKED FOR IT, SKIPPER! BUT I CAN'T EXPECT THEM TO UNDERSTAND - THEY HAVEN'T FLOWN WITH YOU!



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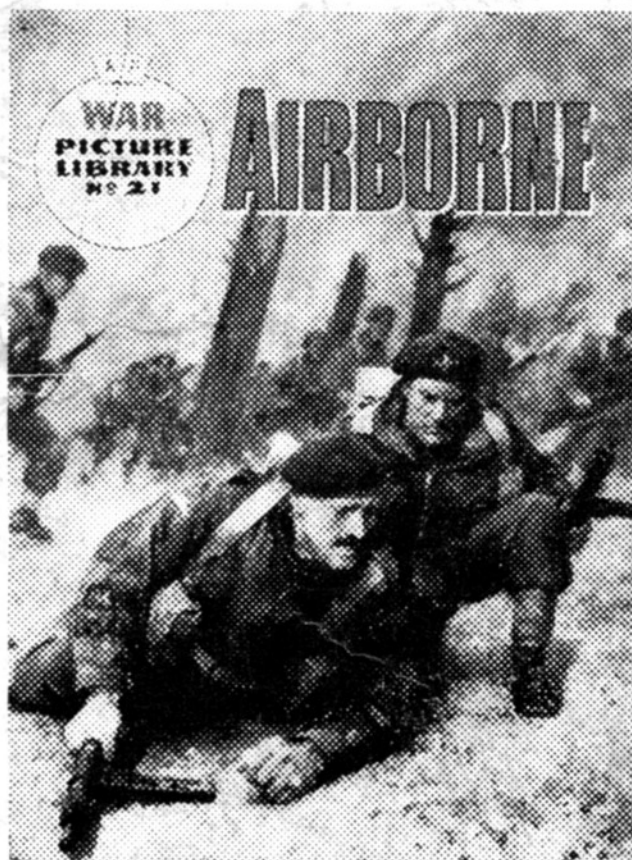
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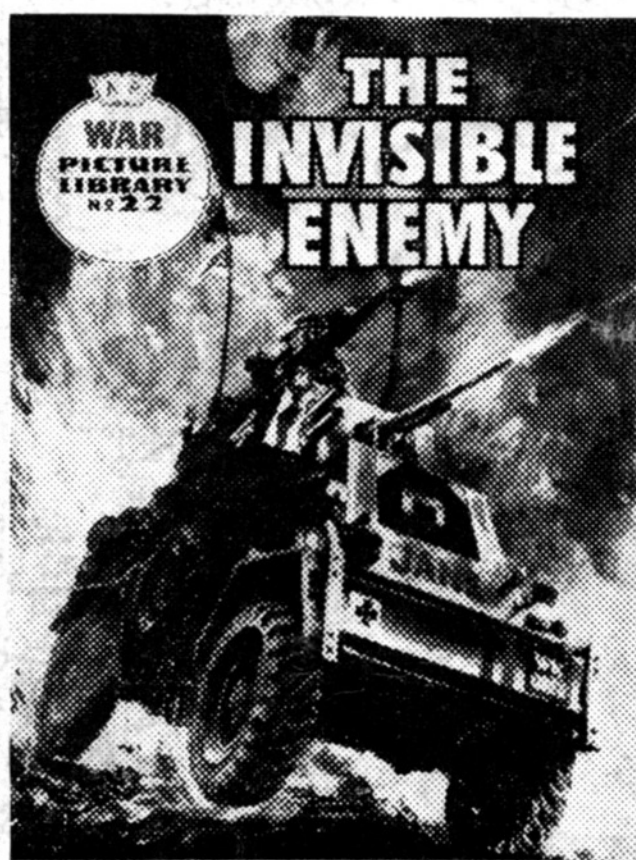
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